ばんぷぷファ♂1

築地俊彦

MF文庫 J

著:築地俊彦
イラスト:せんむ

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Q.
瀬戸口くん
[せとぐち・くん]
常盤台中の一年生。
ちょっとお調子者だが、
とても気さくな男の子。
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Chapter 1

When I woke up early in the morning, there was a strange woman in the mirror.

Everything was the same as usual, or so I thought. I had opened my eyes upon awakening in the morning. Twisting the faucet to wash my face before breakfast, I looked up and saw a woman peering back at me.

She was probably sixteen or seventeen year old. She had pitch black hair and neat firm lips. Her face was split by a straight nose with white skin typical of a Japanese person. Judging from her age it would be appropriate to describe her as a beautiful girl on the brink of becoming a beautiful woman, such was the reality of the beauty in front of me. Were she to be published in a graveur Shonen Manga magazine, her appearance would have it reaching the top of the charts without a hitch.

However even that face was displaying a perplexed expression.

I guess it was only natural to be perplexed. At any rate even I was astonished at this situation.

In the first place it was currently early morning. Moreover it was a weekday. Given that I was just an uninteresting high school student, it is unexpected that something like that would take place after school. Nevertheless, I am having a close encounter with a girl through the mirror. This is something like a miracle.

While not on the level of a wild rose bush, since I have unruly bed hair that stands up, my hair is generally ridiculous looking in the morning. My parents would point at me, openly laughing loudly at me. Even if they were my birth parents they, without allowing for any opportunity to object, had moved far away for job relocation, leaving me at home alone. My hairstyle that had become an object of ridicule for all mankind, that was what I was accustomed to seeing in the mirror. This morning in the washroom, I had been on the verge of affirming that it was still the same as always.

(What had happened……)

Given that it was still morning my mind wasn't fully functional. That this beautiful girl being before my eyes was part of reality, this is something I still can't believe.

(Is the world reflected by the mirror real……?)

Foolishly, I pondered such a thing. It is certainly something doubtful, but somehow it must be real. Otherwise I would never have expected a woman to suddenly appear like this.

Presumably, this would seem to be the "Awakening in the morning to find a cute girl beside your pillow" situation that people dream about. One possibility. Some time ago, while exchanging jokes with my friends we had spoken of "One day a beautiful girl will appear from inside of your desk", I hadn't imagined that I'd encounter it in reality.

As one would expect of **Japan**[1]. The country of Kotodama[2].

Nevertheless, encountering such a sight in reality, as expected it is quite surprising. I do prefer girls who look quite pretty, but for one to appear without any warning.Quite possibly, this could be considered trespassing.

The girl wasn't saying anything. Since she was an intruder, she probably wouldn't be able to speak Japanese. She seemed reserved or rather surprised. Her eyes had been opened wide for some time now.

It was not unreasonable though. To encounter a man in the morning, anyone would be surprised. Sympathizing with her to some extent, I somehow managed to compose myself and reached to my hands towards the running water. I was planning to splash some water on my face to calm down.

"Ha?"

What was with this chick? That she would wash her face at the same time as me. Was this merely a coincidence, or is this harassment?

Looking in the mirror, I was surprised once again. It seemed the girl's mouth was also open as though saying "Ha".

A bad premonition filled my mind.

Occasionally I have a sharp intuition. I had experienced this feeling before. When my baby spotted turtle "Takkun" had died, it had been right before I received a failing grade in four consecutive subjects. I was naturally very sad afterwards. Could the turtle have sensed something?

Remaining completely motionless, I timidly reached my hand towards my cheek.

The girl was also reaching her hand towards her cheek.

In spite of my heart being overcome by panic, at that moment I pinched my cheek with my right hand.

As before the girl was also pinching her cheek.

My premonition was forming dark clouds, which enveloped my mind. Maybe, just maybe. That was me, could that really be?

While trying to calm my mind, still pinching my face as though with a vice, I breathed deeply.Once, twice. At once, my heart feeling like it was being violently stepped on, I became depressed to the point I began to stagger around like a drunk.

At this point I held my breath for the sake of suppressing a scream. Then, with all my strength, I twisted my index finger and thumb.

My cheek was inflicted with unthinkable pain.

“Ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ouch!!”

I rolled around while screaming. The girl on the other side of the mirror was similarly rolling around.

By now there was no doubt. Standing up, I looked down at my own chest in the mirror.

What existed there was a beautiful pair of abundant mounds one would hardly expect to find on a man.

“UWAA!!”

I raised what was probably the largest scream of my life.

“……Why did I become a woman?!!”

Myself who was in the mirror as well was likewise screaming the

same thing.

Shouldn't I call down first? For what reason did such a thing happen?

I am Senou Natsuru, a seventeen year old second year student in high school. Slender and of medium height. As for my grades, at one point my grades were really good, and then there was another time when my grades were really bad. In other words, I am right in them middle. My reflexes are also average. Even if I am describing myself, I really am just average guy that you can find anywhere. The only thing I take pride in is that my eyesight in both eyes exceeds 1.2. Or to put it the other way, there was nothing else I

could take pride in. That's quite sad.

Speaking of things I lack I've never had a girlfriend either. Both my elementary and middle school had been coed, yet when it came to girls they would all pass ahead of me without getting any closer than "friend". In regards to this it might as well say "Never had a relationship with a girl" written across my chest.

Even though that's what one would expect.

To be able to have had a relationship with a girl. That would have been nice. You can say it would likely be delightful. However, while I have been "wishing for a girlfriend", that was no reason for me to "give up on being a man".

“UWAAAA!”

I scream one more time, though it's not as though that did anything to change the situation.

Calm, be calm. I earnestly try to persuade myself.

Since I had already screamed twice, I put forth a great effort to restrain my mind going forward. My throat was sore. It seemed like my mind had been going through this agony for a number of hours, but in reality it had been just under ten minutes. But for the current me, that was the time it had taken for me to start to comprehend what had happened.

To start with for what reason have I turned into a woman?

I have absolutely no idea how this happened. I’ve neither received hormone injections, nor have I even been to Morocco. Nowadays by doing a search on the internet, it's simple to find doctors who can turn you into a woman through plastic surgery, but even with all the benefits of IT something to this extent isn't possible[3].

Well then what is this? The comeback of candid camera?

I peered into the mirror. The beautiful looking girl that was myself had very gloomy expression.

“……Showing such an expression, it spoils a beautiful person.“

I let slip something profound immediately after. Fool. What am I saying to myself?

She is pretty nevertheless. Attentively, I pondered such things. When it comes to the type of girl men like, if one were to paint a vague image in one's mind, you could say confidently that it would resemble her more or less. In fact, with her being right there at the moment, there's just reason to say that "spot on resemblance" is more accurate than "more or less".

If I were to encounter her in town, it goes without saying that I might fall in love as soon as I began conversing with her. If it wasn't myself that is.

I had been looking down at what my body had become. For some time I had been looking at those extremely large breasts. However, it was something else that captivated me.

“……A sailor uniform!?”

Worn by girls, those who wear the sailor uniform often induce dark delusions among the men of the maturing generation.

Immediately after I wake up, I have a habit of changing into my uniform. This was because I would forget something if I waited until after breakfast since I'd be in a hurry. Since I usually oversleep, it goes more smoothly if I do it first thing in the morning. However I don’t remember putting on clothes intended for girls. Naturally I didn't even own such things. Regarding those that have a passion for the sailor uniform, they make up about ten percent of those over the age of thirty.

“This is our school’s uniform……”

It was exactly like the uniform of those who attended his school, to the point you could say it was the very thing itself.

At any rate it's quite mysterious. Having become female, while that itself wasn't a good thing, I am relieved that I am at least wearing clothes. Does that mean some shinobu[4] changed my clothes? If that's the case already, I'd like him to show up right now and return my male clothes. That uniform wasn't cheap.

At any rate it was a sailor uniform. Like what young men wear, it included an unfashionable blazer. Furthermore there was a skirt.

“……Skirt……”

An unpleasant premonition, or perhaps a strange feeling of

anticipation, stirred within my mind.

I realized that there was nobody around, yet I still restlessly checked the vicinity. Confirming I was the only one around, I slowly put my hands to the hem of my skirt.

I flipped it up, and peeked under.

“……It’s a woman’s!”

What the hell. The outcome was just as I feared. What I had purchased during the Ito-Yokado sale the other day, the briefs I bought with three 1000 yen bills, they had become girl's underpants. The ones called panties that middle-aged men are said to sniff. They're firmly wrapped around my thighs. On top of that they have light blue stripes. Why are they striped of all things?

I considered looking at my breasts, but I ceased such mischievous thoughts. It's absolutely certain that I am wearing a bra.

In spite of the despair I felt over the excessive results, I slowly returned to my room. Not just myself but my clothes as well had become those of a woman. I seem to recall an old saying that went "The body is no more than the clothes[5]", but the result is the same either way.

Having entered the room, I dropped onto my rear end with a *petan*[6].

A pretty girl was squatting with her legs in the shape of the character /\. From an objective point of view this was quite an interesting spectacle, but I was currently by myself. It was unthinkable for me to be objective about such a thing.

Slowly, I gazed over at the clock on top of the desk. The digital numbers were informing me “If you don’t go to school soon, won’t you be late?”

'Of course I realize that,' I replied to the clock. To go to school in this situation. To go as a female. When the entire world believed Senou Natsuru to be a young man. If I were to attend school looking like this my homeroom teacher would have a heart attack. As thrilling as that would be, I'd be a murderer after three seconds.

That’s not all. My classmates would be horrified as well. No, it wouldn't be surprising even if they even sprouted hair from their

hearts[7]. It's possible that to make up for it that I'd be sold off of. It'd definitely be something like a hostess bar or a country of foam[8]. There is the issue of human rights on account of me being a minor, but then again do human rights apply to men who metamorphose into women.

I was at my wits end. Nothing decent was coming to mind. What would I do from now on.

Suddenly, I felt something uncomfortable.

(……?)

I looked at my right arm. There was a blue bracelet on it. It was emitting a pale blue light. I had no memory of possessing such a thing.

Trying to touch it, I found it cool to the touch. It was made of metal. However, as to which type of metal it was I cannot guess.

"What's this……"

"It is proof."

"EEK!"

Hearing a voice coming from somewhere, I jumped up from my squatting position.

Turning my head I looked around the room. Even though I ought to be living alone, could there be someone here?

"Over here. Here."

In the direction of the voice, there was a plush toy.

A man who keeps plush toys in his has reprehensible taste, though in this case it couldn't be helped. Moreover this one was extremely unusual.

There are scars here and there on its face like that of a Yakuza[9], with one eye covered with an eye patch. There were fangs sprouting from its mouth like those of a saber tooth tiger, which were quite stiff. Jutting out from its abdomen were realistically reproduced intestines.

This is the “Entrail Animal” character merchandise. It was

something that was part of a commercial line of products for a certain company, the entirety of whose product line was constructed along the concept of poor looking animals with their guts gushing out.

The manufacturer who produced the merchandise had their stock prices take a nosedive immediately following its release, and to this day there is still no sign of recovery. They received a lot of pushback from the shareholders, yet they continued to be stubborn in spite of this. I honestly don't want it either, but since it is something important, I can't bring myself to throw it out.

The plush toy "Harakiri Tora"[10], the fifth in the entrail animal series, had been opening its mouth with a *pakapaka* since some time ago.

"You finally became aware of me huh."

It was a woman's voice. It was somewhat Shizuka-chan-ish. Moreover it's the new version[11]. I was feeling extremely uncomfortable as a result of the entrail animal's appearance.

"What is on your arm is a Pledge Bracelet[12]."

[……Pledge?]

"Due to this being attached to your arm, your power is assured. It will allow you to demonstrate the greatest power in battle."

"Wait, wait a minute, wait!"

I hurriedly waved my hands. Harakiri Tora was saying some cryptic words.

"It's incomprehensible. Why am I talking to a plush toy? For what is it that I'm pledging? In the first place why am I a woman?"

With the shock of having become a woman, I was barely able to form the words to reply to the plush toy. Think about this a little more. Aren't I talking to a plush toy?

Harakiri Tora scratched its eyepatch.

"Is it not clear to you?"

"It's clear to you?"

“Should I explain starting from the creation of the world?”

“I'm not interested in the Bible. What on earth is this?”

“Err, this is”

Harakiri Tora continued speaking with Shizuka-chan’s voice.

“you are now a Kämpfer[13].”

“Haa?”

Is that all this plush toy has to say.

“Kämpfer are elites for the purpose of combat. With the mighty power assured by the Pledge Bracelet, you will decimate your opponents. It's that sort of feeling.”

“……I don't understand it all that well.”

It felt like something I had read in the manual for a game I once played.

“So theses Kämpfer, they are people whose purpose is to fight?”

“That is correct.”

“I've become one of these Kämpfer?”

"Yes."

“And I fight with an enemy?”

"Of course."

"Without knowing the reason?"

"That's right."

Without saying a word, I grabbed Harakiri Tora and threw her into the trash can.

“Waa, what did you do that for?”

“Shaddup! Such an explanation, I can't possibly understand when all you say is 'of course' and 'yes'! Just go to sleep!”

It was all much too sudden. It was as though I'd been given 100 yen

and ordered, "Go save the world with this."

Having turned into a woman, speaking with a plush toy, if only all of this would turn out to be a bad dream. Then this time spent as a Kämpfer would be something that never happened.

"In any case it cannot be helped."

A voice was coming from the garbage can.

“Since after all you have been chosen.”

“Is that believable?”

Even on the edge of consciousness, I was replying.

“It ought to be believable. Right now, wouldn't you agree that you are a girl?”

Being told this, I once again looked over myself. It was a woman's body in a sailor suit.

“Look look. That should make you understand.”

“……Not yet.”

I crossed my arms while facing the trash can.

“This woman's body, in what way is this connected to the agreement?”

“There is no way to be a Kämpfer without becoming a woman.”

“I was a man!”

“And therefore your body became that of a girl. When they are selected, boys become girls.”

“Can't you have an alternative be selected instead?”

“Of course not."

The trash can (that Harakiri Tora was inside of), spoke as though it was someone else's problem.

I reached into the trash and retrieved the plush doll. In any case, I can't afford to throw it out. I put it back on the desk

“Thanks. It is quite cramped in that trash can.”

It was really quite becoming of you though.

"That aside, what's the deal with this bracelet?"

“The Pledge Bracelet is the sign that identifies you as a Kämpfer. When it shines, you will become a Kämpfer.”

I began examining the bracelet once again. There was no seam on it, so I had no idea how exactly they'd gone about putting it on.

“Oh, you cannot take it off.”

Harakiri Tora spoke as though it had seen through my thoughts.

“It cannot be removed except under extreme circumstances. In that case you'd completely stop being a Kämpfer.”

“How would I remove it?”

“Dying for example.”

“OI!”

Saying something like that is worthless.

“Please think of it as an accessory. It's not that heavy.”

For certain, it was so light that that I didn't feel any additional burden on my wrist.

“Why is it blue?”

“Are you not pleased with it?"

"Red would be good. It's possible I could become three times as fast[14].”

“That is significant. However I wasn't taught that.”

It let out a suppressed laugh. To be speaking like that with Shizuka-chan's voice, it made me especially angry.

“Back to the previous discussion. Why do Kämpfer fight? And who?”

“It is because they exist for the sake of fighting. That is reality.”

Sensing I was about to toss it into the trash again, Harakiri Torashe hurriedly added one more thing.

“For Kämpfer fighting is their only raison d'être. They have been specialized explicitly for combat. You were the optimal person for this. Therefore you were selected.”

“……Even though I'm saying this about myself, anyone who say me would agree that I'm just a simple human being. In what way am I the most suitable for this?"

“Could you ask the one that to the person who chose you?"

“You didn't chose me?”

“You were chosen by a Moderator.”

Moderator. Who is that?

“It is the one whose duty is to pick out people with the right qualities. You were perfectly suited.”

“What are you supposed to be then?”

“I am a Messenger of the Moderator. Like the messengers still spoken of in legend. An angel so to speak.”

“Something can be an angel while showing off its entrails?”

Such awful taste. Devout Christians would probably get angry if they saw this.

This is what the story appears to be. That is to say, I was chosen by the Moderators to be a Kämpfer. There's a bracelet as proof, and I take on the form of a woman to fight.

“It seems you understand, right.”

The plush doll’s tone had become like that of a teacher's. I was staring at it with absolute hatred.

“So, although I’ve been asking for a while, you haven't explained for what purpose I'd be fighting for.”

“……”

“Are you trying to imitate a plush doll?”

I was rummaging inside the desk. There should be a one hundred yen lighter somewhere. I don't smoke tobacco, but it assuredly is something useful to have. Such as setting fire to synthetic fibers.

“Fire is not alright. Vinyl gives off a terrible smell when it burns.”

“Weren't you not speaking?”

I produced the lighter from within. There was also gas.

“Therefore can you please stop.”

“Why don't you also beg in the voice of Shizuka-chan like before?”[15]

I can't say it out loud, but the present manner was quite pleasing.

“As a matter of fact even I do not know. Why do they fight?”

“You're speaking like that now?”[16]

“Since the Moderators are stingy, they haven't informed me of that. I wasn't that curious either.”

"You serve no purpose. None other than having your entrails gushing out of your stomach."

“It is because I am a plush toy.”

I put the lighter away in my skirt pocket. It doesn't matter to me if it's the worst for the skirt. I let out a deep sigh.

“But hey, since I am am going to be fighting, then I would assume there's an opponent to fight, right?”

“That is so.”

“Who is it?”

“That's confidential.”

“This motherfucker.”

I do not know whether this is manly, but for the moment I cursed like this.

“By now you should understand. Since you assuredly are a

Kämpfer.”

The only thing I could understand was that there didn't seem to be any reason to fight.

I once again grabbed my head. What one earth is this? All of a sudden I'm being told I have to fight as this thing called a Kämpfer, or something like that. In what way can I possibly agree to something like!?

“Hahhahha. Looks like you cannot accept this reality.”

That's obvious. You dare to laugh in such a carefree way about this. In the first place I've never before believed that the things this plush doll was explaining existed as part of reality.

“However this is indeed reality. You are a Kämpfer just as I told you. It is all true without any falsehood.”

“……”

“Can you not accept this?”

Well I must admit.

“It seems you are beginning to understand at any rate. Since after all you assuredly are a Kämpfer.”

I gazed into Harakiri Tora’s eyes.This guy's talk seems completely bogus no matter how you look at it. However it didn't seem likely that she had some outrageous ulterior motive.

If I were to believe the words of this guy, I had been selected to become this kind of existence. The fact I had become a woman was proof of this. Moreover I was told that this form is for fighting.

Even so the idea of fighting gives me an unpleasant feeling. Is this guy's intention to to insist upon me engaging in battle without even knowing the reason?

“This is what you become when it is time to fight.”

Said Harakiri Tora.

“Having been chosen as a Kämpfer, that you must fight is unconditional.”

“Why is it that I must fight?”

"It will be clear soon enough.”

Only at times like this does the plush doll become full of self-confidence. It's a tendency of Shizuka-chan.

Feeling that any more questions would be pointless, I stopped talking. Since even if I were to continue asking, it wouldn't say much more than that. Also it would probably just pretend to be a plush toy again.

I gazed over at the clock. I was on the verge of being late."

“Oh, that's the most important thing!”

“That's enough, please withhold any further questions?”

“I'll burn you. Do I have to remain as a woman?!”

I have to go to school already. Now that's it's come to this, I’ll have to run without eating breakfast, so why don't you finally answer my question. Having to attend school as a girl + a sailor uniform, that was like a punishment game.

"Is it painful being a woman?"

“That's a misunderstanding!"

"Although it is possible to revert you to being a man.”

Immediately the world before my eyes became brighter. Minamoto Shizuka-sama, can I revert to being a boy as usual?

“Oi get on with it already.”

“In order do this you absolutely must fight.”

“What's up with that?”

“It is a simple reason. If you continue to win fights successively, you will have no more enemies, and hence you will have no reason to turn into a female. In that case you can remain a man permanently.”

“I see……wait, isn't that a considerably long way off!”

“But your wish would come true in that case.”

“You complete idiot! This is something of immediate importance. I can't go to school like this!”

“Hmm”

Harakiri Tora had been contemplating for a short while.

“There is no other way. I will teach you a way to return to your original form instantly.”

“That’s it, teach me. No, please teach me!”

I had grabbed ahold of the plush toy. The present me was prepared to bow my head as many times as it takes towards the Shizuka-voiced Harakiri Tora.

“You are quite impatient.”

“What do you expect of an Edokko[17]. Teach me immediately. Hurry up already!”

“Well then please close your eyes.”

“Alright.”

As I was told, I closed both eyes. Only Harakiri Tora’s voice could be heard.

“Well then, here I go.”

Go? What is she doing?

An instant after I began to experience doubt, I suffered a severe blow to my abdominal region.

A throbbing pain came from the base of my abdomen. This damn plush doll, it had struck me. Next time I'm going to burn her for sure. With those final thoughts, the inside of my head became pitch black.

“HAH!”

My eyes awakened.

I jumped up on reflex. Overenthusiastically kicking aside the futon, I ended up falling back onto the bed.

Bed? I looked around the inside of the room. It was the room I was familiar with. The usual morning scenery.

I timidly gaze at myself. My breasts weren't large.

Hurriedly getting out of bed, and peered into the television that was not receiving electricity. Since my room has no mirror, I use this as a substitute.

There was no mistaking that it was myself, as there was a man's face there.

A great joy surged from the depths of my heart.

“Ah… I did it!”

I raised a shout of ten-thousand year old quality[18] I am a man that didn't become a woman. Everything was as it had been. There exists no such beings as Kämpfer.

While jumping up and down I approached the front of the desk.

"You, it was all a lie huh. That you were returning me to normal."

I said this to Harakiri Tora. However there was no reply.

“Hey……?”

I brought my face in close. It was motionless without so much as twitching. I grabbed it and shook it, but there was no reaction. Even when seizing the tusks growing from its mouth, they were sown on perfectly and hadn't moved all day. Despite its looks it was just an ordinary plush toy.

Ideas were swirling around my mind. Harakiri Tora the plush toy continued sleeping. Apparently the events that had been happening up until a short while ago didn't actually happen. Perhaps, all of it had just been a dream.

“I see……what a dream.”

I steadily began to rejoice.

“YEAH! It was a dream, it was only a dream!”

I don't care that I have started talking to myself. I was jumping for joy. Turning into a woman to be a Kämpfer, as well as being forced to fight under circumstances I don't understand, such outrageous things were no longer happening.

“Hurray, hurray, with this I’m just an ordinary person. I am unrelated to things like combat!”

I was running around the room while jumping for joy. Even compared to having a year's worth of holidays, it couldn't compare to the joy I was experiencing. After have finished thoroughly jumping for joy, thinking that I should probably go to school, I suddenly looked at my arm.

I doubted my own eyes. There was a pale blue bracelet. Could this possibly be……?

“You would agree that it is not a dream, right?”

Harakiri Tora shook her head while saying that with a sigh.

Given tat it was the cruel time for attending school, I went outside in a gloomy mood. When I raised my eyes the sky was cloudy. It was the the worst for improving my mood. and while I looked up outside I saw cloudy weather. This good feeling was the worst.

"This isn't a dream by any means. This is all reality," Harakari Tiger told me point blank. I wish I heard such a thing, but it seems there's no good in denying it. I asked the question that came to mind "Why were you being silent?", but it had pitifully answered "Since you seemed really delighted."

“But is this not good? It seems you returned to your male form.”

Hearing Harakiri Tora making something like an argument with that manner of speaking was raising my blood pressure.

"It's not fine. Having to suffer such a severe blow to change back is the worst. Isn't there a much more preferable means?"

“In truth you would change back automatically. I just wanted to do it in a mischievous manner.”

“Don't ever do that.”

The area around my abdomen was still painfully throbbing.

“Right right. It would be good idea to buy clothes.”

“I have no interest in fashion.”

I in no way understood the idea of spending money on clothes. Even when I browse fashion magazines, all the clothes appear to resemble one another. After all what is fashionable changes frequently.

“I was not talking about menswear. I was talking about women's clothing. Would those not be necessary for when you have transformed.”

Huh? Why would I ever need to purchase women's clothes?

To my doubts, Harakiri Tora nodded as though it was natural.

“When you metamorphose, your male school uniform transforms into the female one. However that is the only one. Therefore other clothes will not transform.”

“Shouldn't it be okay with whatever I happen to be wearing at the time?”

“Most likely the size wouldn't match.”

Come to think of it, my breasts among other things become huge.

But how would I go about getting such things like women’s clothes? If a man were to enter such a shop alone, wouldn't he immediately get treated as a pervert? Moreover when it comes to underwear…… I'd rather not think about such topics.

“Then, in that case why don't I just turn into a woman?”

“So it has come to this just as expected.”

“Don't be so delighted about it. I was only asking.”

“It was not me who made you transform just now, that was something that happens automatically. For the time being.”

“And the conditions are?”

"That is something you will become clear from now on."

This plush toy, it seems that it's going to put on airs of superiority until the bitter end. Damn it. I won't forget this.

Time is up at this point. I was stuck with going to school without any breakfast. Harakiri Tora was saying “Buy some rice to eat on the way, then you can finish it while your walking. Please don't care about getting anything for me.” That was obvious. Who would care about you?

I was on the verge of being late, but I did stop by a convenience store on the way. In a hurry I purchased onigiri[19]. As I was previously told, I considered eating it while I was walking, but I gave up on that idea because it was just shameful. It will okay to wait until the first break.

In order to make up for being late, I began to run in earnest. I rounded a certain corner.

“Uwah ! ”

“Kyah!”

Having collided with someone, I stumbled. The other person turned around.

“S……sorry. Huh?”

After apologizing on reflex, I saw the person's face. Oh snap, it was a person I know.

“I’m so sorry. I was looking the other way……no way, Natsuru-san?”

The other person I had collided with was a girl.

"Thank goodness……that's not what I should be saying. But I felt somewhat relieved that it was someone I know."

Sakura Kaede was laughing to hide her embarrassment.

She has an invigorating face topped by lustrous hair. She was somewhat short of stature with graceful body lines. Sakura-chan is the idol of the school. Simply put, she was among the top five beautiful gives at our school, and with her personality she was easily at the top. If I who turned into a girl were to be thought of as only "more or less", it would be due to her.

She is an object of many high school boys at our school, and naturally I also admired her. Moreover I have been her classmate since middle school. Speaking on my own behalf, I have been a hardcore admirer.

I waved my hand saying “Don't worry about it” to Sakura-san.

“It's fine it's fine. Since it's not as though I fell over.”

“Is that so? Natsuru-san is very kind.”

This is unbearable. As a benefit of having been in the same class back in middle school, she addresses me by my first name. While being struck by my heart's rapid beating, I feigned calmness.

“Why don't we go to school together?”

“That's fine. Since I’m already late.”

Sakura-san consented while smiling at me.

I was so overcome with joy I was able to forget the events from this morning. To be able to go to school with Sakura-san when it's just the two of us, that is a tale of incredible luck. For the boys aiming to become acquainted with her, they'd be willing to pay by the minute for this. Though it was unexpected, since it’s like using up a lifetime of good luck, as of today winning the lottery will likely be impossible.

The two of us were walking to school side by side. The mood feels much like a date.

“You seem to be cheerful Natsuru-san. Did something good happen?”

“It certainly did. I got to meet Sakura-san.”

The line I let slip out could be said to be uncool, but Sakura-san didn't find it foolish at all.

“Aha. I also think it's nice to have met Natsuru-san. It's a good thing to oversleep on occasion.”

Replying with such a quality smile, that's one of her favorable points. But Sakura-san, in this situation that can make a man misunderstand.

Sorry but I did not misunderstand. It would be expected for her that she'd be going out with someone, yet there are no rumors of such a thing. However many good boys spoke up without wavering, the legend was that, “Even if you passed the exam for Toudai[20] you would fail when it came to Kaede.” Even for myself when there was this and that opportunity to be with Sakura-san, it is my belief that even if I were to express my feelings it would only end with me being completely rejected. Therefore I should just enjoy the present state of affairs.

“Since I've had some unpleasant things happening since this morning. It was nice to have met Sakura-san.”

“Is that so?”

I am listening anxiously.

"Just a second. Whatever, it's fine...or rather, I've given up." **(!)**

I recall a profoundly heavy feeling; I cannot forget the unforgettable, and I decide to push the matter into the farthest corner of my mind.

“That’s right. How is the plush doll I gave you?”

“I-it’s there, decorating the top of my desk.”

“Good, I love that series, I’ve already accumulated the complete collection; I’ve even been fostering any that have been discarded.”

Sakura-san was innocently delighted at this.

Yes, the Entrails Animal Series stuffed animal was given to me by Sakura-san; so he cannot trash or abandon it.

He had a different sense of taste, it was “cute” but it also fit other criterion such as “cute and grotesque,” in all sincerity I also thought it was cute. So, the glo-series one I have, I had loved it without hesitation. No, of course, my comic taste is also out of admiration for her.

According to rumors, Sakura-san’s room is even like stepping into a world of Entrails Animal Goods.

“Do you think Harakiri Tora is cute?”

What a difficult question to answer.

“Ye-yeah, distinctly.”

“I’m happy to hear you say so.”

“I bet it would have a voice like Shizuka-chan.”

That pained me; Sakura-san had a mystified look on her face.

The school road has no one else on it; we have plenty of time, the only other people here are jobless and tardy students. Sakura-san and I are obviously of the latter group.

We were talking silly while we continued along. Or rather, the topic was about Entrails Animals with Sakura-san, while I was trying to desperately continue the deflected conversation. She must have remembered the frustration and cleverly doctored conversation skills, following every morning to bring more to light.

While Sakura-san was talking, my sight kept flickering to my right arm.

“…What is that bracelet?”

An example is the bracelet, while I touch it,

“No, well I often wear this bracelet.”

“What brand is it?”

“Come now, how should I say this, Kämpfer?”

“…A German brand?”

It is not a brand at all. To begin with it’s not even a fashion accessory.

Obviously, since I can remember, I cannot leave this bracelet and its pledge. There is no seam, so I cannot resist or take it off. Not that I care anymore, but when asked to explain like now, it is troublesome.

What do I say, considering the moment?

“Ooh, its shining.”

Quickly checking, as Sakura-san said the bracelet is, in fact, shining.

A thin blue light was shining, flickering at regular intervals. This is the first time for this reaction; a sign of transformation maybe or…?

“do… do you need to do something?”**(!)**

The worst thing that can happen is becoming a woman here, outside next to Sakura-san. Once she’s seen me transform, she may call out; even better still, I could become a test specimen in someplace-somewhere.

“Uuh hey, Sakura-san. I’m sorry but I have to go on ahead.”

“Ah, how unfair Natsuru-san. Didn’t you say we could go together?”

Her cheeks are adoringly inflated. The Infatuation meter has risen; I cannot afford this absentmindedness. While striving to be calm,

“For I remembered. Well, For what we have. And anyways I have to leave here soon.” **(!)**

“I will also run if you do.”

Sorry, sorry. Please let me go alone somehow.

The bracelet’s blinking is speeding up. This horrible childish feeling is rapidly becoming reality. An earnestly dangerous situation.

Abruptly I saw a protruding gun’s muzzle.

“…A gun?”

I was speechless.

I watched keenly. Humans are not funny, and jokes about how nothing unexpected happens, strangely seemingly settled down my mind. At gunpoint that was now the case.

“What’s this? A woman and my enemy chattering, do you have eyes now?”

The primary gun, that the talking woman has, is enormous, but looks like a dummy.

She was slightly lower than my height; her tone of voice was terrible. Her skin was white and stylish, but no matter how “Beautiful” you classified the appearance, just as beautiful were sharp eyes profusely saying, “Caution Vicious Dog” as a poster

would, and I would not be surprised with the poster having her picture on it.

“This sleepy man is the enemy blocking the story of innovation. He is a man and failed to hear me, what you are fancifully last?”

She wore a bored expression, and then pulled the trigger.

“Just a, please wait!”

Since we were about to be killed, we hurriedly raised out hands.

“What’s this all of the sudden! A mugging?!”

“Idiot, what are you fucking saying? A mugger as beautiful as this exists?”

She also referred to herself as a rare beauty.

“Apparently not!”

“What’s you name then? Mine is Mishima Akane [Beautiful Island of Crimson Noise]”

“I am Senou[Torrent of skill] Natsuru… Isn’t that a gun!”

“What, this?”

She was dangling the muzzle a bit.

“This guy is mai～ weapon. The trigger can blow bullets out of you; one can even open some breathing holes, if it hits your skull, literary don’t you think?”

Where is the literature, what!?

The girl was, as usual, staring with eyes like a dog on the verge of pouncing. Come one! Come all! Less hostile, murderous satisfaction.

“So what’s the hold up here!?”

“Shut up man! Stop talking!”[21]

It is not such a hard question and my life is on the line here!

“When suddenly everybody is about to be killed?!”

Wishing to ignore my appeal, her line of sight shifted. There, failing to understand the situation, is the figure of Sakura-san.

“Huh? You guy is that your girl?”[22]

I would be very glad if that was the case, but unfortunately it is not. There is no red; okay there are no others.

She stared at Sakura-san and watched her.

“What Sakura-san isn’t it? Aren't we Classmates?”

Now that you mention it, this girl is wearing our school uniform. But it has been customized with a shorter short sleeve hem. At any rate this is Sakura-san’s classmate, so that means, I am in the same high school as her?

“Hey, we go to the same fucking school”

“Really?”

Akane put returned the muzzle.

“Hey I can’t do without battling as I am expected to. Such as what I troubled to have said. To go against, come on! Instead of scratching my crotch at home, so I should do something a little constructive.”

What’s Constructive huh? It is being destructive me. Furthermore, prospects of reconstruction are zero.

“What good is that! Since you are my enemy, I will beat you to death.”

Enemy? “Enemy trouble,” perhaps?

Suddenly, my bracelet is flickering at the speed of lightning. My body started to move involuntarily.

“Dowaa!?”

“Oh, this motherfucker!”

Like I was being pulled into something like that. I’m running, not much however, the distance past one corner.

The vicious dog woman, I understand, is chasing me while holding a gun, but I wasn’t that much better.

Flashing emissions from the bracelet continued. A pale light envelops my entire body. A little glow was spreading; my whole body feels like it was washed away.

The light suddenly disappeared.

“Ahh…”

Looking down at my body. Sailor uniform with large breasts, and a short-skirt; the woman I had changed into this morning.

No light relieved him, but at the same time he wanted to hang his neck. Son of a Bitch, this morning was also reality? As a bonus I met with Sakura-san if it continued, but there was the hold up by the foul-mouthed woman. However it is complicated with the transformation into a woman. Is it blessing in disguise to be hidden away from Sakura-san, but what am I now?

“Haa… Ahahahahaa…!”

I heard wild laughter; unnoticed for some time, the woman with the gun in one hand was laughing.

“Great I say! As I had thought you were also a Kämpfer!”

I was frightened.

She was proudly pointing at him. If you look closely there was also a bracelet fitted on her right arm.

“It is as such because there wasn’t many motherfuckers [to fight] there.”

I see the gunpoint coming at me.

“Haa!? Why are you expected to fight me?”

“Why come on you don’t know? Kämpfer fight for the sake of existing. I will blow your head off to Jupiter!”

“I heard. Even so you…”

“Kämpfer are enemies to Kämpfer assuredly.”

This is the first time hearing this. Harakiri Tora had mentioned a fight against [Secret], did she mean this?

However, how am I expected to fight? This woman has a weapon in her hand pointed in my direction. My opponent won't go easy on me just because I don't have a weapon. Rather she opened fire, while abhorrently laughing.

"Do it soon! If you don't run away I'm going to shoot you."

"If I escape you won't shoot!?"

"Well, shooting."

She squeezed the trigger.

A bullet flew out from the muzzle on the brink of me, and my body moved.

Akane after looking right… She carried the gun outside towards me, naturally when that happened I jumped from where I was, literally without any regards to my intent.

Although a bullet just passed through where I had just been standing.

Akane, now provoked, narrowly glance around murmuring "this motherfucker" overlooked me, when she was suddenly embraced.

The vicious dog-woman drew the trigger in quick succession.

And how, her fingers cramped up suddenly from bring her index finger back and forth continuously, like drunkards on New Year's Eve spitting out lead bullets.

Already off of the route to school and onto a noisy construction site; certainly her firearm had to be loaded again and again, but it should be limited, whereas Akane had been shooting indefinitely.

For this reason I have no margin of error.

I dodged all the bullets flying at me. I also was, and without regard to the difficulty, moving my whole body, automatically, to escape past fences and telephone poles.

Timidly take a quick look while unseen, Akane's facial expression had become incessantly stern.

"Very well done, isn't it."[23]

Thank you for the praise. I'm just going to run away now.

"However, Hey! Know this, my Gewehr[gun] can, infact, blow a wall to the stars. How many bullets, however, can your ass receive like shots from National Health Insurance.

It's no joke. Yes! Pierce this wall with your tool, try to do something to my beautiful ass. What, there is nothing like it over there. I expect this is unfair.[24]

"Nothing is expected is it not."

Hear me hated one[25], putting my thought into words is a bad habit that's not going to change.

However, whether or not there will be time to change that, this vicious dog woman is earnestly trying to kill me.

Its time.

Instead Sakura-san unexpectedly made an appearance.

"Natsuru… san?"

After hearing that I became stiff. I abruptly ran because, maybe, I can visit these circumstances.

"Ehh… Natsuru-san… haa…?"

Fierce dog woman quickly turned the gun towards her.

"As yet hated[26], obediently continue on to school like a good-Samaritan.

Those eyes have a look like an actual hound detecting its prey. Or, possibly like the look my father gives to the spectator rapid-fire sneezing in a movie theater.

Shit girl, no intruding!"

The trigger finger connected.[27]That's dangerous Sakura-san!! I spoke out at once.

“Hey!”

Simultaneously, the palm of my hand became hotter.

Surprisingly, considering the moment, a crimson flame came twisting from my fingers.

The large flaming fireball next plunged forward to Akane. Without change it stole the fence on the opposite side with a direct hit.

The explosion smashed into the brick wall, shattering it into pieces.

“…!?”

Words of astonishment came from Sakura-san.

The Handgun carrying girl however, did not receive any shock.

“Bastard…Zauber[Sorcery]?"

“Hee? Zauber…?”

“Don’t play innocent. And I thought it was funny you were empty handed. Hey! Invoking items from your hand requires considerable refinement.”

More importantly I had a sensation of being hit by a steel frame being place on my head.

This morning I have met various things like a woman entwined in a plush doll that had talked, but the final blow had been the fireball exiting my hand. “Perhaps the whole of what Harakiri Tora was saying had been a lie, that I would be only a high school student,” clinging, but I had no grounds for hope, and it is tragically extinct. Kämpfer’s title had now become Katakana[ケンプファー] . [28]Mother, father; life sure is an irrational thing, that can be assured.

“What! The fact is I am hanging at the point of death.”

“…Preetenssee”

“Well good! After all this time you can feel free, the killing will finally be done!”[29]

“Wait! To that extent, wait up!"

“I’m exhausted from your omissions!”

The gun is being prepared to come piercing through me. Filling the distance in order to certainly intending to kill. In good order the face and its fierce dog like emotions, was rapidly closing in.

When seeing that face, about to be dead like an ant lion being blown away. The person is assuredly serious. I have to be on guard, but from the fire ball from a while ago already, it seems, had not brought this to an end. A jet engine in my brain, flying around like a revolving lantern.[30]

Unpredictably, the fierce dog woman’s movement stopped.

The muzzle pointed in this direction as it was bore, I noticed what I was looking at.

Her gaze is being filled by the bracelet on my right arm.

“…tchi”

Clicking her tongue while swinging her right hand. To the extent the handgun had went in order to kill and erase me.

“Dear it is not it.”

Akane said and spit out, turned herself around, the handgun quickly followed suit.

Afterwards the woman left leaving me and Sakura-san.

“…Umm…”

Sakura-san coming to speak. It is troubling as to how I should reply to her, gently smile and run away silently.

Just as that woman here had, I will follow her plan however.

Notes

1. ↑ For whatever reason, Japan was written as "Nippon" in Katekana instead of the usual Kanji
2. ↑ Kotodama, meaning the power of words, is a Japanese belief that words can magically affect reality. In short, he's saying that by telling the story, the story came to life.
3. ↑ Not sure why the Japanese uses IT here. I might have misunderstood the reference.
4. ↑ Similar to a ninja
5. ↑ This was hard to translate but should be similar to "The clothes make the man" in meaning
6. ↑ Sound of something making firm contact with a flat surface
7. ↑ That's literal. Not sure what an English equivalent would be but the meaning seems clear enough
8. ↑ Again, that's the literal translation.
9. ↑ Japanese gang or mafia
10. ↑ Harakiri means ritual suicide by self-disembowelment. Tora means tiger
11. ↑ I believe this is a reference to a character from the anime Doraemon.
12. ↑ Bracelet in english
13. ↑ Kanji:Combatant. Note: Kämpfer is German for fighter
14. ↑ This is a reference to the Red Comet from Mobile Suit Gundam
15. ↑ Harakiri Tora was using a very polite form of speech before. Since the point where fire became a concern, its speech pattern changed.
16. ↑ The speech pattern reverted
17. ↑ Someone born in the Edo region. Typically thought to have different personalities compared to other parts of Japan
18. ↑ That's literal. Not sure how to render it.
19. ↑ Rice balls
20. ↑ Short for Tokyo University
21. ↑ Akane has a Kansai accent apparently and I dont really know how to translate Kansai without looking up a hundred different resources so be aware it may not be 100% accurate after im done translating i will probably look up more on this to make it as correct as possible
22. ↑ Akane speaks in a very masculine derogatory slang filled speech here
23. ↑ Akane says done as in doing your sexual partner, then

proceeds to say isn't it in a masculine way, haha
24. ↑ Natsuru's monologue is in a feminine form here
25. ↑ A bit of speech in japanese directing towards an enemy, kindof hard to put in english so i put this
26. ↑ Sakura
27. ↑ connected as in not to disconnect
28. ↑ he says that he recognizes Kämpfer as a concept now since he had thought of it as a spelling in Katakana
29. ↑ again done as having sex
30. ↑ The seriousness in the situation is related to thoughts swirling around in his(her) head like a revolving jet engine

Chapter 2

I dove into classroom 2-4, but I was still late. First class had already started and everyone but me had taken their seats. The infamous Classic Literature teacher glared at me, pointed to the blackboard and said "use yomikudashibun". That's transcription of Chinese classics into Japanese, and I somehow managed to do the assignment after five attempts.

I had returned to the appearance of a man. While I was running to school my bracelet glowed and my sailor uniform changed into a blazer and pants. Harakiri-tora didn't lie when he said I'd change back automatically, although the change made me feel sick.

I had no idea how Sakura-san was doing, probably answering for her tardiness in a similar way, but her class subject would be mathematics.

Our school was segregated boys and girls didn't share classes, or even the same buildings. I attended Iron Star Academy High School and it was open to boys and girls but wasn't co-ed. Originally it was a girls' school founded before the war. The term *'iron'* was not in reference to miners, but to developing strong women. The school catered to teaching girls of privileged families domestic arts.

Ten years ago it began to accept male students. The announced reason doors were opened to male candidates was to *'keep with the times'* but most people assumed it was to maintain the level of student fees collected.

Although common to historic schools, opinions of graduates were influential in affecting management. Iron Star Academy did not deviate from that practice.

The OG's (Original Graduates)[1] complained that *'men are cunning, who knows what effect they will have on female students.'* Their recommendation was to *'separate the school by sexes at least.'* After debate the Board of Directors passed it by a narrow margin. The extensive grounds were divided in two with a fence to separate the girls and boys sections. Passage from one side to the other was closely monitored and rarely allowed. It seemed like *'one hand doesn't know what the other is doing'* since information between the sides was severely limited. To further please the OG's and avoid

waste they printed the entrance exam in a magazine.

That's the dark history of Iron Star Academy. The legend continues that the initial separation was just a white line on the ground, but the boys crossed the line in droves to visit the girls. Honestly!

Until yesterday there was no confusion that I was male, so I'm enrolled in the boys' academy at Iron Star. Now it seems the future isn't as certain.

The previous class ended at 1:00 and it was time for lunch break. I quickly ate the convenience store onigiri I bought on the way in. With the remaining time I planned to take a quiet nap. Whenever I'm bored a nap is appreciated, and if it helped me pay attention in afternoon classes it was even more advantageous.

I went to the waste basket to discard the wrapper but a classmate was beckoning me. It was the strangely stylish yet immoral Higashida. He was the self-appointed chairman of the Iron Star Beauty Research Club. It was a covert club, not that a club like that could ever be considered official. I had heard that he could *'know a beauty by the sound of her breath,'* and that he could actually name the girls walking on the opposite side of a wall. Sounds impressive, but who could confirm his answers?

"Senou, you're being called."

"If it's the teacher, tell him I'm dead."

"No dude," Higashida's voice was hushed. "A girl, a female student."

That woke me up.

The boys' and girls' sections are in separate buildings. The school strongly limits who is allowed to cross between the sides. *'As much as possible, restrict travel between sections.'* The academy even has separate main entrances for each section. The only students allowed to freely cross the boundary were student council members and class representatives. Ordinary student needed a permit. The procedure to obtain a permit was complicated and amazingly convoluted. That's not to say there weren't ways for the determined students to find passage. The loopholes were closely guarded secrets that were only given verbally. Large illicit activities based on these exchanges were also rumored to occur.

"A girl?"

"Asking for you."

"Is it Sakura-san?"

"Idiot, it would be big news for Sakura Kaede to visit the boys' side. If she came asking for you, there would be death squads formed to hunt you down."

Sakura-san is one of the two most beautiful girls at Iron Star Academy. Her reputation was stellar, but she had never visited the boys' side. That made her a *'hell of a mystery'* to the boys. In addition to Sakura-san the other leading beauty was Student Council President Shizuku Sangou.

"Well, this morning I met Sakura-san."

"Ah, it's true that Sakura-san was late for her first class just like you. Just a miracle of a coincidence."

"Just telling you."

"If you had met an Iron Star Beauty, I would have heard." Higashida oddly puffed his chest out with pride.

"The girl who asked for me?"

"Oh yeah, in the hallway."

Thanks to Higashida I left the class room and discarded my plan for a nap. In the hallway was a girl, standing there she seemed to have no presence about her; very somber, wearing an out of trend hair-band. I wasn't sure but it appeared she wore glasses; I couldn't be sure because she was looking down. The girl and I stood in silence for a while. Although I was called on, she wouldn't talk first.

"Well, you asked for me?"

"... yes..."

The conversation made it that far, then stopped again.

"How did you manage to get here... I wonder."

"Yes..."

"So, what's your name?"

"Oh... oh... I'm a member of the library committee."

"Huh?"

She ignored my confusion and kept talking.

"Since... I'm in the library committee... I'm allowed in the boys' side. The library... deals with both sides of the school."

She noticed that she hadn't answered me and bowed quickly to apologize.

"Oh... Please, I'm sorry... I've been saying strange things... I rarely talk to boys."

This was a pure-hearted and innocent girl. Nervous in front of boys.

"I'm sorry... accept my apology... so sorry..."

She bowed many times.

"Don't go that far," I waved my hand.

I'm not experienced talking to girls, but this was extreme.

"Please don't worry about it, just let me know your name."

"It is..."

"Yes?"

"...Mishima Akane."

"Huh...?"

My mouth hung open so far my jaw almost came loose. Akane's face turned bright red and she looked back at the floor.

Akane and I went to the library. The library is a separate building built on the border between the two halves the school. Since books are shared, the library was unisex. It had guards stationed at both doorways leading to each half of campus. We came here because Akane had said *'the boys' side... makes me anxious.'* Since she was

used to the library she wouldn't be as nervous there. We sat face-to-face across a wide library table.

Akane was as squirmy as ever. She was probably still getting used to the location, but she began to speak. The conversation turned to the main topic.

"I'm... also a Kämpfer," She said while showing me the bracelet attached to her right arm. "This is a... Bracelet of Oath."

"Yeah, I've heard..."

"It's proof... of being Kämpfer."

"I also have one... but..." my mouth dropped and my eyes opened wide, "you're really the girl from this morning?"

"Yes..." Akane's face turned purplish-red, "...that was me."

"You said I had an *'amazingly fat ass'* ..."

"Yes..."

"You'd *'kill me.'* "

"Yes..."

"Called me a *'bitch.'* "

"Yes..."

"You always become that girl when you're a Kämpfer?"

"Yes..."

"...with that personality?"

"Please... do not tease me anymore...!"

Behind her glasses, she was on the verge of tears... ugh, she started crying.

"Please forgive me Senou-san... When I become Kämpfer... I say all sorts of vulgar things without thinking. I'm truly sorry!"

Thanks to Akane kowtowing and choking up crying, we were the center of attention from the surrounding students. I was honestly embarrassed.

"I'm good, I'm good. Don't worry about it, I was just surprised," I reassured her while smiling.

"I become a girl when I change, but I didn't know a Kämpfer could also change personality."

"It's true..." Akane said as she raised her head slightly, still crying. "Even I can't believe it. It's scary to think about... I'm always surprised at what she does..."

I took a harder look at her. If I looked past the timidness and fragile voice, I could just make out the very same vicious dog girl I dealt

with that morning.

"Why did you fight me?"

"On my way to school... I suddenly transformed. I looked around... all I saw was Senou-kun and that other girl..."

I also transformed suddenly, but in my case it was after meeting Akane.

"The opponent of a Kämpfer... is a Kämpfer. I did think it was strange that Senou-san was a boy."

"But you suddenly stopped fighting."

"I found out you were a partner."

"Huh, a partner!?"

"Your bracelet, blue means you're my partner."

She held out her arm and her bracelet was the same pale-blue as mine.

"...I shouldn't attack my partner."

"So, what about the enemy?"

"They have bracelets too, only red."

I was impressed, "you know a lot about it."

"Seppuku-kuro-usagi, my Entrails Animal stuffed toy told me."

Apparently I'm not the only one with a moderator's messenger. Her's is also an Entrails Animal. I thought about asking if she liked that type of grotesque series, but I decided to pass. There was a big difference in the amount of information each of our messengers divulged. Harakiri-tora was considerably more tight-lipped.

"How do you transform?"

"If I want to I can transform myself. If there is another Kämpfer in the area I may also transform. In the morning I must have sensed Senou-san."

"How do you get back to normal?"

"When you haven't been fighting," she was shy, but smiled.

Her smile was rather lovely, she was good looking behind her timidness.

I remembered it took a while to return that morning, "how much time does it take to return to normal?"

"Until you learn to change yourself it varies. At first it's very random. It may be five minutes, but one time it took me two days."

Aw crap, that sounds like trouble. I wouldn't be able to go to school, since my tuition only paid for the boys' section.

"Come to think of it, you had a pistol. Do we get weapons?"

"I fight with a *'gun,'* Senou-san fights with *'magic.'* "

"I don't follow," this was all new to me.

"Item... I fight with a handgun, I can't fight empty-handed. When I transform the item I use is provided. Since Senou-san uses magic no item is needed."

"Oh..." it didn't make me feel any better. It came naturally to me that morning the first time I needed it.

"Seppuku-kuro-usagi told me there are three types of weapons for Kämpfer; *'gun,' 'magic'* and *'sword.'* "

"Those only." I'd never seen the sword. The only Kämpfer I knew were Akane and myself anyway.

"They're called *'Gewehr'* , *'Zauber'* and *'Schwert.'* They are hard to pronounce since they're German."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. Also *'kämpfer'* is German, except the female noun would be *'kämpferin,'* but all I hear used is *'kämpfer.'* I wonder why though."

Sorry, but I have no knowledge of foreign languages.

"Why do we fight?"

"I don't know either...," Akane is apologetic. "I've asked Seppuku-kuro-usagi, but she wouldn't tell me, no matter how many times I

asked."

So, she doesn't know either, same as me. Nobody seems to know, the reason still isn't clear. How many Kämpfer were there? Where were they? There weren't any answers for me. All I could tell was what was put in front of me. If anything comes up it comes up.

Akane looked anxious, "did I say too much...?"

"Huh?"

"I'm sorry, I can be obtrusive, I just say things without thinking..." her face looked tearful again.

I panicked, "oh, I'm really sorry, I just got lost in my own thoughts. Please forgive me."

"That's good..." her face looked relieved. Very different from the expression I saw at gunpoint on the way to school.

"It's just that... that..." she was fidgeting nervously. Probably not because she had to use a bathroom though.

"Se... Senou-san, can you tell me..."

"Yes?"

"Ah, ah... it's the first time I... a Kämpfer and... talking with a boy... well... I want to hear Senou-san's story. I'm sorry!" Akane's face turned bright crimson and she bowed low enough for her hear to rest on the table.

"It's impolite, right? Impolite, right? The first time to meet someone, to ask such a thing. I should be more polite, right? I've been blushing so much because I am not accustomed to talking to boys. It's useless, but I want to talk more, I would like to hear all about you. Please forgive me, I'm so sorry!"

She had talked without even a break to take a breath, there was no way for me to interrupt. Aw crap... she began to cry loudly and buried her face in the desk. I'd watch scenes like this on television, but never in person. I was at a loss at what to do. I was not used to dealing with girls. Students all around were intently watching us. I decided I had to do *'something'* to comfort her.

"It's not bad for you to ask. Mishima-san please raise your head."

I'd rather say *'I'm not bad.'* I know saying something like that can lead to the opposite effect, like a souvenir from Hokkaido of a carved bear with a salmon in it's mouth[2]

"I'll talk... I'll talk... I'll tell you all about me." I began to talk without waiting for her reply.

I told her about my class: (second year classroom 4), my parents: (transferred to Kumamoto[3]), favorite TV genre: (variety show), grades: (average), future dreams: (none).

While I was telling her this I was thinking that I seemed so average. I made a perfect image of a *'typical high school student'* featured in a newspaper. I started explaining the less usual part about my parents moving away for their jobs and letting me stay behind. My insipid story seemed to be interesting to Akane, she was eager to hear more. She stopped crying before long, I was saved.

I also told her about my morning waking up in a woman's body. How Harakiri-tora aggravated me and spoke in the voice of Shizuka-chan[4].

She chuckled when I said *'Shizuka-chan,'* "that's funny."

"That I like anime?"

"Not just that. I like anime too."

And she's part of the library committee? I started to loosen up. I tried to think, but I'd never talked so openly to a girl before. It's not as if I had a girlfriend.

"Well, Mishima-san, it's your turn."

"Eh, eh..." Her face turned red again, no more crying, but a bit different then before. "Oh, I... I'm just a somber girl..."

"I doubt that. Start with your class."

"The fourth classroom... in the second year. My favorite subjects are... and I... I... I..." her voice got quieter and quieter.

That didn't seem like a good topic. I'd have to find something easier to answer.

"When did you become Kämpfer?"

"Six months ago, I woke up and opened my eyes. My body was hot and I was holding a big gun that I strangely wanted to shoot. I had a feeling someone would knock at the door and would try to shoot me..."

This is Japan, except for policemen and yakuza, nobody has a gun. It's more likely she'd be shooting at a pedestrian walking by.

"Then Seppuku-kuro-usagi started to speak. *'You are Kämpfer.'* " Akane looked embarrassed for some reason.

"Suddenly my gun was in my hand and I wanted to riddle Seppuku-kuro-usagi's belly with bullets."

"I can understand that..." I chimed in, but there was a short pause after.

"I listened to her, and knew somehow it was true, I was Kämpfer. Although that was after I threw Seppuku-kuro-usagi out the window about six times."

That reminded me of tossing Harakiri-tora in the trashcan repeatedly, amazingly similar. Then I asked the most important thing.

"In the last six months have you had to fight other Kämpfer?"

"I..." she looked down slightly again, "I fought with a sword wielding Kämpfer. I thought I won, but it was only a draw. I shouted a lot of vulgar words..."

Sounds like it ended in trash talk. I got a taste of it that morning, so I didn't need to ask for details.

"I always try to find a way to control my language when I become Kämpfer, but it never does any good."

"Maybe that's just the way it works," at my words she paused to listen. "Mishima-san changes personality, I change gender. Maybe it's like a fighting ritual for Kämpfer."

"...like a fighting ritual. Huh..."

Although it seems a bit much for a Kämpfer ritual to turn me into a girl.

"Well, that's what I'm thinking. It's what's needed to turn someone

ordinary into extraordinary."

"Transformed to a hero with the desire to defeat villains."

"Are we heroes or villains, and how can we tell?"

That stuffed animal didn't explain anything of importance after all, probably just turned me into a women with no reason. Akane started to look worried for some reason.

"Oh, forget what I just said, I was just thinking out loud."

"It's just that I have similar thoughts."

"Like what, Mishima-san?"

"That..." she hesitated. " *'Akane[5]'* is fine, that's what all my classmates call me. Even though I've never been called that... by a man..."

She looked down and started to blush deeply. I thought I should reply quickly.

"Well, *'Natsuru'* is good for me also."

"Okay..., Natsuru-san."

I glanced at the clock on the wall. Lunch-break would be over soon.

I stood up, "I'll be heading back."

"I... I'm... usually in the library. If you ever want to talk."

"Sounds great, thanks."

I remembered something Harakiri-tora told me that morning[6].

"Can I ask you for a favor?"

"What's... that...?"

"I want to go out with you."

Akane batted her eyes and turned bright red, "but... Natsuru-san and I... we just met today for the first time..."

"I need to do some shopping and I'd appreciate your help."

Her expression suddenly looked very odd and she slumped her shoulders. What kind of reaction was that!?

"I don't have any girls' clothes, if I can't change back. I need help knowing what to buy."

"I see... If you're satisfied with my help..."

"Please."

Even though Akane was disappointed for some reason, I was greatly relieved. One of my big concerns about this situation would disappear. I still needed food if I didn't want more tsukudani[7]. I glanced at the clock again. My stomach was still empty, but it was time for class. The teacher was already sore at me being late for morning class.

"See you, Akane-chan," I said as I turned to leave.

Suddenly I saw glowing in the corner of my eye. The bracelet on my right arm was flashing, fast! Oh crap, this was... The back of my head was hit by a hard object.

"Yo, ya got some balls, adding *'chan'* ta mah name! Ya son of a bitch."

That wasn't Akane's shy voice...

I raised my hands like in western movies. I turned around slowly, praying she didn't shoot. Where Akane had been, I stood at the gunpoint of the vicious dog girl.

"Akane-chan, huh? Who do ya think Ay am, an obese cat lover livin' in a condo?"

I know she didn't like it, but what was she saying? There's no confusing this girl with the normal version.

"You told me to call you that."

Akane wasn't listening, "there are two things that Ay can't stand in this world. One's letting peanut-butter toast fall to da ground, an' da other's when people add *'chan'* to ma name! Natsuru, friends are

allowed to use ma first name, no honorifics!"

"Friend, or partner?"

"Did ya forget? That bracelet hangin' from ya pale arm is da same color as mine. If ya weren't a friend Ay would have sent you to Hawaii full of lead bullets."

"Of course I know we're partners, but *'friend?'* "

"Ay know, but that little voice in ma head keeps whisperin' yer okay. Yer ma partner, yer okay, so yer ma friend. That's all there is to it."

"Guess that's it then." The whispers in my head were telling me to get my phone, call for help and hope someone could save me.

Akane's eyes were in serious vicious dog mode. "Paranoid dickwad, yer thinkin' Ay'm a character outta some Dostoevsky novel, huh? Ya complain and ya'll be missin' everything from the neck up."

"We don't have time for this."

"Ya think Ay'm a fool? Just became Kämpfer if ya wanna fight."

That's true; why had Akane suddenly turned into Kämpfer. If she didn't change herself there must be a reason. I had to make my *'friend'* think about it.

"Akane-chan..."

"Ya have a death-wish?"

"Akane... Why did you transform?"

"Huh?"

"Why did you become Kämpfer. Like you said before, there must be someone wanting to fight."

In the library a gust blew, "there's a Kämpfer nearby."

Before I could blink something blurred past my eyes. There was a loud thunk and there was a large dagger embedded deep in the table. Akane's handgun reacted. Her gun looked like it was American Government issue, spitting streams of death. Like hounds seeing a fox, a flock of bullets rushed to find their prey. It sounds

poetic, but even if I say so myself, those shots all disappeared somewhere.

"Natsuru, hit the floor!" Akane yelled, as we both fell together to the floor.

"If ya wanna avoid skippin' across the Styx change and get ready ta fight!"

"I refuse!"

"Then Ay'll do it myself!"

I tried to resist but before I knew it I had become a girl, firmly wrapped in a skirt.

The other students in the library were surprised at the sudden firefight. They all ran off wailing loudly. Some of the female students were sobbing, they had fallen over each other trying to escape. They had my pity. I hope they weren't traumatized.

I tried to see what the vicious dog girl was doing, but I was still face-down on the floor. I could hear the gun blasting continuously.

"You have such a thirst for blood. If it's an old man I'm sure he died of shock."

"Hey, let's flush out our target!" Akane looked at me with evil purpose.

"Get yer eyes off the ground and help. Is yer skull full of Baby Star Ramen, ya bastard?"

No my head isn't stuffed with Baby Star Ramen, I'm just an amateur at fighting. Give me a break. I was smart enough not to say that to Akane though. She grabbed my collar and dragged me upright anyway. Man that hurt, what happened to us being *'friends?'*

"Natsuru, listen, run over behind that bookshelf over there, Ay'll follow."

It was an encyclopedia shelf covered in dust, with no empty spaces. I suppose it would make a decent shield.

"Run on the count of one... one! Go!"

I tried to jump towards the shelf and my foot slipped. Damn hot-

headed girl, don't play at a time like that! I didn't want to get mad at Akane, but that wasn't the time to joke around.

"Ya failed at listenin' to mah count."

"Yeah, I don't want to get sliced."

"Look, we gotta work together to attack the *'sword'* Kämpfer."

Was she serious? Akane kept cursing at me. This *'chick'* had just became a Kämpfer that morning while Akane had been one for six months. Less than one day compared to 180, her experience made a difference.

"I'm not just worried about a haircut."

"Kill da skirt. Haven't ya taken yer compulsory sword classes?"

"So, what kind of sword is it?"

"Don't know. Ay saw as it flew in front of us; too small ta be a two-handed sword, too big to be a knife. Ya wanna know more, go ask the attacker."

I'd ask, but I haven't seen the attacker yet. Akane's fierce eyes shifted left and right doing reconnaissance like a dog. I tried to follow her example, but had no idea what I was doing.

"Let's get ta work..." She began to count, "one, two, three!"

We dashed at the same time. Our movements weren't full of confidence, but for the distance we had to go it didn't matter. We both dove behind the bookshelf. I ended up underneath Akane. Her stance reminded me of a hunched vicious dog, ready to attack. She was surprisingly light, and soft. No, that was her considerable chest. She had a lovely scent to her. Because we were both wearing skirts our bare legs got firmly entangled. I hadn't been thinking like that for even half a second, but Akane's fierce burgundy eyes glared at me.

"Hey, ya lookin' at me like a lesbian. The way ya were picturin' me in yer head, try picturin' yer'self bein' killed."

Uh, no, I want to live. I followed the warnings and decided to look away from Akane's body. *'Clang... clang...'* a metallic sound rang out.

Akane chuckled, "our opponent's weapon can't get through. These

books are tough."

Books were heavier than they appeared, even more so for thick encyclopedia volumes. The shelf was sturdy steel designed to support a heavy load. It made the perfect shield.

"Ready to counterattack, my lesbian buddy?"

When was I promoted from partner to *'buddy?'* Hey, hope she knows I'm not really a lesbian.

"You say counterattack, but where's the enemy?" I gingerly looked through a crack between volumes. I could only see dust dancing, not a chance of seeing our enemy.

"Hiding like a cancer. We gotta treat it the same way."

"So, how's this counterattack going to work?"

"Buddy, that's where yer needed." Akane looked down towards me and grinned as she approached. "Perfect plan. Ya run out from hidin', enemy attacks, Ay counterattack."

"Is that your plan?"

"Either that or ya suck on mah gun like it's a honeycomb..."

"Okay, guess I'll go!" I had been volunteered to become a decoy. Perfect plan my ass, the way things were looking, my role would be to get chopped up.

Akane was impatient and getting angry, "yer thin, ya'll make it one way or another."

"You probably won't take responsibility for me if I die."

"Ay'll be responsible for makin' ya die if ya don't go." She put both hands over my mouth as I was about to scream, stupid aggressive girl. "It's da end of da discussion."

"You call that a discussion?"

"Bastard, ya got magic. Ya got speed. Find a place that ya can defend and leave da enemy ta me." Akane smiled, "Ay'm countin' on ya buddy."

I was puzzled by her smile. She is truly lovely when she smiles.

Deceived by that smile I crawled to the edge of the shelves. Still no sign of the enemy.

"Akane, give me a signal when I should run."

"Go whenever ya want. Ya'll manage, somehow."

Her smile and words didn't match, another thought crossed my mind. The timing to run out without getting hit only works if someone is looking for enemy fire. Maybe my *'magic'* could deflect the knife. Hmm, my mind was pondering, by the counter argument was staring at me from much closer. If Akane wasn't overly concerned I have to match her resolve.

I took a breath and prepared, "I'll go."

"Go quickly!"

I kicked off the floor and left the cover of the shelves. At the same time I thought what is my *'trigger'* for my *'magic?'* I had no idea. First the vicious dog girl says whatever words would get me to go, then I foolishly rush into the decision to go. Turns out I didn't have to worry, the enemy wasn't attacking me.

Then I saw the gleam of the shiny blade right behind me; I had been ignored. The enemy saw through my decoy attempt. The blade continued past me. As I had thought, the enemy's weapon was a dirk; a long dagger or a short sword. There was no doubt, I saw it clearly, I bet Akane saw it as well. There were two dirks, attached to chains. I saw them freely moving like snakes, but the enemy remained invisible. The enemy Kämpfer manipulated them safely from a distance. All I heard were metallic sounds as the blades cut through the steel bookshelf with ease and it started to collapse on Akane. Crap! I turned and pulled her hand before it fell on her. One dirk turned and pointed at us, Akane fired and the blade was deflected. It withdrew into the distance.

"Lick-a-bitch!" Akane said as she spit out blood. Had her mouth been cut? "Ay'm patient, Ay'll send 'em to da netherworld!"

"We'll be the ones dying if we don't find the enemy."

"Next time execute dat motherfscker like Ceaușescu[8]! Got it?"

A dirk flew at us again, we crouched and it grazed us.

"Da enemy heard and reacted."

"Was Ceaușescu disliked?"

"An enemy of science, just like Gihren Zabi[9] shot in the back of the head."

"But does that mean..." I suddenly saw a foot at the edge of my vision.

Akane's gun turned as fast as my gaze. Standing next to that partially destroyed bookshelf was Sakura-san. Why was she here?

Akane yelled, "it's the motherfscker."

Just like that morning, Sakura-san was under gunpoint.

"...playin' with us eh? This time ya'll playfully die!"

Akane was on the verge of pulling the trigger. I grabbed Sakura-san's arm and pulled her out of the way while Akane showered bullets at us. I held tight to Sakura-san and rolled on the floor.

"Akane stop!"

"Ya pumpkin head! She's da enemy!"

"Who's the pumpkin!? Sakura-san isn't a Kämpfer!"

Akane's angry eyes softened slightly.

"Say what?"

"She doesn't have any weapons. She's a normal person."

"Maybe she dropped 'em."

"That doesn't make sense."

From above both blades flew at us. We quickly jumped out of the way. They left a hole in the floor then retracted to the distance, not to Sakura-san's hands.

"See."

"...crap!" Akane was frustrated and turned the other way.

"Look how scared she looks, is that the face of an enemy?"

"Da chains are comin' from further away."

It was true, it seemed to be coming from just outside the doorway. Aiming for our hiding spot, but staying invisible. Akane was getting more grumpy.

"Tell dat Kaede whore ta stay outta da way when Ay'm fightin' Kämpfer!"

Hey hey, why are you calling her a whore? Sakura-san's face was pale. I tried to calm her mood.

"Why are you here Sakura-san?"

"... oh... I had to look up some references in the library... There was a terrible sound and I tried to escape, but couldn't get past."

What bad luck to be caught in the middle of Kämpfer fighting twice in one day, both times involved me.

"Even if she was a doddering ol' hag, she's dead if she get in da way again!" Akane's rage wasn't lessening, she was full of hostility.

I started to confront her and got her gun's muzzle between my eyebrows, so I quickly stopped.

"Dat's right, back off."

"I'm not backing off. I'll vouch for Kaede, if she gets in your way again, take the punishment out on me."

This girl, even if she and one man were the last people on the planet she would turn them into enemies. She would try to push her way through a scrum[10] line of policemen.

"Yo Natsuru, talkin' back ain't in yer nature. What ya think ya are, my husband?"

"Not a chance in the world, unless by gunpoint."

"Al'right, but I get ta shoot ya if she bothers me?"

"Whatever, just leave her alone."

"Yer lucky, Kaede survives, for now."

Akane's eyes had a dull glow. Is she serious? Just when it appeared

that she was about to fire at me a dirk came between a gap between books. I pushed Sakura-san out of the way. The blade nearly grazed her neck. Akane opened fired as I rolled out of the way. By the time I twisted around to look the dirk had disappeared. Dangerous! I was almost skewered and sold as a new style of kebab.

"Damn it, so annoying!" Akane had turned her wrath from Sakura-san to the invisible enemy. "Yer gonna have a face full a holes so yer brain can cool off! Natsuru, yer silly girl over there sprung a leak."

I looked, but she wasn't *'leaking,'* she had fainted from the sudden volley of bullets fired by the vicious dog girl. She had crumbled to the floor, unconscious, still as death before my eyes.

"Pinch 'er and see if she's dead."

No, fainting is a normal reaction, your nerves are just too thick. Mine must be too, my head was calm as if nothing was happening. Another byproduct of the Kämpfer transformation?

Kin-Kon, Kan-Kon The end of lunch bell sounded.

"Crap, Ay'm gonna be late," Akane lamented.

"You're serious?"

"Of course, even tho' Ay may seem like a meek girl, Ay love ta study, despite my looks."

"Even with a foul mouth?"

"Hey, Ay'll miss class at this rate!" Akane pointed the gun at me again. I knew my comment was risky.

"Hey, just so ya know Ay'm an honor student."

"Unfortunately, I think you're going to be late. I gave up trying after I was late three times."

"Don't be proud 'a that."

"I'm not a *'good'* boy, it's my way of not standing out in class."

We both paused and fell silent. We listened but there was no sound of the enemy. Even though the attacks weren't constant, the gaps never had lasted this long. No sound of dirks cutting through the air

or chains snaking along.

"The attack stopped..."

Akane said, "no sign of 'em."

"That's a first."

"We're not done, where'd ya go?"

I didn't answer, there was no way to know. After a short time we both got up and came out from our cover. It was a gamble, but sure enough there was no attack.

"Our enemy is gone."

"Sounds like cold feet ta me."

"I'm not so sure."

"What did ya say?"

The enemy had been calm and didn't even fall for my decoy attempt. I don't think we had the upper hand. There must have been a reason to call off the attack.

Akane was kicking the floor of the library, "late ta class and didn't get anything ta eat."

I wasn't too worried about being late. I didn't have a perfect attendance to maintain. Suddenly a thought came to mind.

"Hey Akane, maybe our enemy in an honor student."

"Yeah? Why would ya say that?"

"Seeing how much you're worried about it, maybe the enemy didn't want to be late either."

"Same as me?... Ya think our enemy's an honor student at Iron Star?"

"Well, it's a thought." I was guessing of course, there was no evidence. Somehow my intuition led me to think I was right. Another power of being Kämpfer?

"Ay'm headin' back to da women's section. Natsuru, yer on yer

own."

"I'll go home, but what about Sakura-san?"

She was still passed out on the floor.

Akane was pretending to pick her ear, "don't make a woman do strenuous work. You can carry her."

"But I'm a woman now too."

"Just words, yer bad-ass enough to handle 'er."

"You're just complaining to get out of it."

"Ay'm a white-collar worker."

I was about to say, *'you and me both'* but I said hello to her gun's muzzle instead.

"Physical labor is a man's work, right?"

The pistol was more convincing than any words that could pass my lips. I accepted without hesitation.

She clucked her tongue and stored the dirk in her cuff. The chain and other dirk were put away silently. She checked her left wrist, it was already time.

"...can't be late!"

Any good student hates to miss classes. Being a good student doesn't just mean living up to the image, it also means denying yourself of fun to avoid a bad reputation. Her hand slapped a table and dust flew up. The library was in a sad shape. She hated harming the books, but it was worth it. Besides, she could get the budget committee to buy new books.

While walking calmly to her next class at Iron Star Academy she brushed her school uniform and made sure it was perfect. Just before the teacher came through the door she sat at her desk.

Notes

1. ↑ OG - original text used "OG". I assume it refers to Original Graduates and could be a play on the term "Original Ganstas".
2. ↑ Hokkaido Carved Bear - the most common souvenir to bring back from Hokkaido is an Ainu carved bear. The Ainu are indigenous people of Japan. They believe bears and salmon represent gods on earth. Most carved bear souvenirs aren't made by the Ainu. I think the author is referring to these carvings being known to be mostly fakes.
3. ↑ Kumamoto - main city in large island in south-west Japan, a 95 minute flight from Tokyo.
4. ↑ Shizuka Minamoto - the main female character in Doraemon.
5. ↑ Akane-chan - Akane doesn't specify the honorific to use, but it can be assumed that she should be called "Akane-chan" by a fellow second year student like Natsuru.
6. ↑ Harakiri-tora told Natsuru that girls' clothes would be needed if he transformed when he wasn't wearing his school uniform
7. ↑ Tsukudani - a side dish of seafood and seaweed simmered in soy sauce and mirin (his cupboards are empty).
8. ↑ Ceaușescu - Romanian Dictator : http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicolae_Ceau%C8%99escu
9. ↑ Gihren Zabi - see Mobile Suit Gundam The Plot to Assassinate Gihren : http://gundam.wikia.com/wiki/Mobile_Suit_Gundam_The_Plot_to_Assassinate_Gihren
10. ↑ Scrum - a tight rugby formation and struggle to gain possession of the ball.

Chapter 3

The Secret Garden [1]

I carried Sakura-san to the school nurse's office. The passage to the girl's section was sealed off *'without permission men cannot enter the women's side'* but now that *'I'm a woman'* it was open to me.

I was carrying the fainted Sakura-san, feeling a bit unsteady at the situation. Akane left while laughing wholeheartedly. Crap, I'll get you for this. If I'm a pumpkin, you're a cabbage.[2]

Nevertheless, Sakura-san's body was light and soft, and my heart beat loudly. I was touching the body of a woman I yearned for, if I died at that moment I would have died happy.

The person in charge of nurse's office in the girl's section was a man with awfully long hair. His voice sounded like a soccer game narrator. He pointed to a bed, said "lay her there", without taking his eyes off the paper he was reading. What good is a nurse's office without a nurse?

While I waited for quite a while after I left the infirmary, I wasn't changing back to a man. Akane had said that the time it takes to return at first is highly random, but what to do for now.'

I could hide under the dead space under the stairs of the first floor (is that where bad girls smoke?).

While I was a woman in the girls section it still was strange to not be in a class. I wouldn't set off the "intruder alert" like I would if I were a guy, but still I couldn't just attend class either. First of all there wouldn't be a seat for me. I couldn't escape the school without alerting the police and getting into worse trouble.

I made a decision, since I was already here I would stealthily explore the girl's section. Well, I couldn't look too stealthy without drawing attention.

I pretended I was an Iron Star Academy High School Girl's student, and climbed the stairs.

Now that I had the time to look around, the girl's side was quite beautiful. Even through the building's astringent era of style, the interior was spotless and clean. Coming from the boy's side the difference was immense, the boy's cleaning seemed sloppy. The

smell of the place was inviting. To say that I wasn't curious to look around would be a lie. This heart-pounding feeling matched the exhilaration of a young grade school boy peeking into the girl's bathroom.

I wasn't discovered by school staff. Even though I had "I'm running an errand for the teacher" excuse prepared, it was never used. As I walked I grew more brave and started walking with a grand swagger.

A lone girl walked towards me. She had long hair, giving her a look of innocence. I quickened my steps as we approached. As she passed she was looking down. She was wearing a sailor uniform with signs of wear, but the wear disagreed with the insignia on her collar indicating a first year student. She must be innocent.

As we passed each other, and I started to feel relieved I heard a muttering "...she's so cool". Cool?

"I'm sorry."

She was hailing me.

"You're a senpai?"

My appearance is as her senior, so I silently nodded.

"How do I get to the student council room? I have to drop off something, but I don't know the way..."

Hahaa. Lost on campus? It's to be expected. The school may be small, but when you think everything is straight you'd end up at a dead end. It's like being in thick woods and not being able to see your way. After all, the school was constructed as addition on top of addition.

As for the student council room it isn't in this building, it's attached to the library.

When I thought about explaining, I realized I still had a masculine voice, so I pointed my finger in silence.

"...." the girl was confused.

"Well, uh ..."

Hmm, I decided to talk just a little. "Over there." I pointed my

finger out the window and was about to walk off.

"That... what?" she was talking timidly. "Can't you guide me?"

"..." what a pain.

Of course I know how to get to the library, I just came from there. I entered the girl's side even though I'm not a girl. What happens if I return to a boy while guiding her? This seems to be my fate, or my ending. "FIN" / the end.

My answer, "even if you ask..." oops, I had used my natural voice. I talk too much.

The long hair girl looked disheartened, by recovered immediately.

"I want a senpai to show me around."

Why is that?

"I just transferred, I don't know my way around Iron Star Academy, but I'd like to know more senpai!"

I was drowned in the details.

Well, I do seem to know my way around. I'm a boy in the second grade, and someone just tried to kill me in the library. Of all the students on the boy's side, other than Higashida, I am the most knowledgeable about the girl's side. Higashida knows more, but he wasn't called.

I took a look at my bracelet to see if there were any signs of it glowing, it still looked fine.

I shrugged my shoulders and signaled her to follow.

The girl enthusiastically follows me, with a skip in her step. We walked out of the building into the courtyard.

She started talking casually.

"Second grade, huh?"

I can't deny it, my collar emblem can be easily seen.

"I'm glad I was admitted to a school with super-cool senpai!"

It made me feel good to get praised like that, plus it was my first time being called "senpai".

"Please tell me your name"

What should I say... The name Senou Natsuru is a man's name and not suitable for women. In the first place, I'm a boy who shouldn't be in the girl's section. I have no choice but to keep silent again.

"Hey, sen - pa - i!"

This girl, who I thought was shy, was becoming very familiar with me.

"Please tell me," as she casually grabbed my arm.

"..." of course I still pretended not to hear. The girl puffed up her cheeks.

"Fine, if you don't tell me I'll yell and get you caught. I know you're a second-year student cutting class."

Wait, wait... If you did that, the story would get very complicated.

This girl obviously didn't care. It didn't matter that she didn't know the circumstances were so unusual, and didn't know my predicament. It looked like she was enjoying my nervousness.

"Eh ..."

"Better to just tell me, no?" she sidled up to me with a cruel, peculiar, smile.

Where could I run and escape? The same instant I prayed *'heaven help me'* , and heard a bell chime.

' *BONG' 'BONG'* , the end of class.

It was a boring math class I had skipped, but I didn't care.

"Over there!" I pointed to the student council room with my finger and quickly turned my back. After being paralyzed I didn't want to face the students coming from the girl's section.

As I tried to move away, that girl still clung to my arm.

"Ah... please wait" she wasn't moving towards the student council

room.

A crowd of school girls streamed out of the building. I could say that I had to quickly get to a specific classroom. That should be an excuse to get away from her. Yeah, right, she wouldn't care.

"It's... Natsuru-san?" came a weak whisper. In a group of sailor suits, I saw a surprised Akane.

It was the form she had before turning into the vicious-dog girl.

"Oh... what went wrong?"

I whispered my answer, "the transformation hasn't happened yet."

"That's a long time, but why are you still here?"

"I was asked to guide..."

Just then the long-haired girl yelled "Oh wow, Akane!"

Akane was shocked, "Masumi-chan ...!"

"...is it, that Akane is an acquaintance of senpai?"

"Senpai... you mean Natsuru-san?"

Before I could say *'baka'* , the girl called Masumi grew a foolish grin.

Akane understood, "Natsuru-san wasn't... referring to... ", she panicked.

I panicked too.

Masumi started laughing from her belly, "so, Akane and Natsuru-san are acquaintances!"

"...as for that... what is Masumi-chan doing in a place like this?"

"The teacher sent me on an errand, yup yup!"

I stealthily asked Akane ("you know each other?")

("It's... we've been friends since we were a year old...")

From a year old, compared to Akane, she had grown relatively impudent.

"Well Akane, thanks for teaching me Natsuru's name!"

"Teaching..."

"Yes, aside from you, I also want to be chummy with Natsuru-san. But... I think that may be impossible..."

"Why not just ask Natsuru-san directly?"

"That's... impossible. Akane will teach me then."

The actors may have changed, but the situation was familiar. Masumi was brandishing Akane, just as the vicious-dog girl brandished her gun while yelling "kill!" There was no sign of the timid nervous girl from the hallway any longer.

I was nervous, too nervous. I had no clue when was the transformation going to happen. Fortunately there was no change in the bracelet, but I had to pay attention to it.

Akane was being interrogated by Masumi and looked about ready to cry.

I winked at Akane and indicated the boy's side with a flick of my eyes.

"I think... Natsuru-san is busy, therefore... and I have the same business as Natsuru-san, so..."

"When school ends... is a little..."

I stiffened... this could be trouble. I pulled Akane.

("You're exposing everything... you talk too much")

("I, what can I say... because I...")

("Just give a simple lie. Don't tell my whole story when you've just reunited.")

("...yeah, I understand, but we need to buy you some clothes.")

("as far as that goes... it's already going to be painful.")

("Natsuru-san, you need to prepare for your needs.")

("...I'll just run away, anywhere but here.")

I ran away, with the feeling of being an antelope. Masumi's voice was pleading "wait you two" from behind us. Of course, I pretended not to hear; even a 20-ton truck couldn't stop me.

I escaped and decided to hide out in the women's bathroom of the library. I quietly locked myself in a private stall.

Trying to stay quiet and waste time in a toilet stall is not

recommended. My bracelet still did nothing, I quickly got bored. I tried to sleep by leaning against the wall, but that didn't work either.

I sat in that stall until all classes let out; it was praiseworthy. Even then there was no sign of transforming back to a man.

After the day's end rush went through I finally made it outside. My body ached and my bones creaked so loudly I thought my joins would break.

I blended in with the leaving students. I was excited, it would be my first time passing through the girl's school gates.

Girls were staring at me from every side. Needless to say it felt like every student of the Iron Star Academy Girl's High School. My mood was still overcast from not being able to return to being a boy, otherwise the attention would have been amazing.

As I passed through the school gates I heard a voice.

"Natsuru-san." It was Akane.

Her head was still down, but somehow it looked even lower than usual.

I walked up to her, "your homeroom got out early?"

"Yes... it got out early. Since Natsuru-san was going to shop for clothes, I decided to wait."

"Ah... that's right. Thank you."

"I'm sorry."

"For what?" Did something happen?

"There's a person who wants to go with us..."

"What?"

"She said that if Natsuru-san buys a dress, she absolutely must go also... I'm sorry."

"Like who?"

"...someone like me..." That girl I had escaped from earlier appeared

with a smile from ear-to-ear.

Going Shopping

Her statistics:

> Full name: Nishino Masumi.
> Number of classes taken: three for year one.
> Blood type: B.
> Hobby: likes to listen to music while sleeping.
> Sizes: by all means please confirm her three sizes by yourself.

She told all this without prompting. In fact she was jumping with excitement to tell me. The only thing I didn't hear were her childhood diseases.

Of course, I asked Akane ("why her?")

("She... she chased after me and all attempts to evade her failed.")

("But she's so eager to join us.")

("True, when it comes to Natsuru-san, she has taken a keen interest...")

("Should we run again?")

("I doubt we'd escape...")

So, I ended up shopping with two girls; one quiet, one noisy. Masumi led us while skipping, Akane and I were depressed. To the world it appeared we were being led by a wonton goddess bewitching us.

"Natsuru-san, you're buying clothes?" The question accompanied Masumi's smile.

I didn't want to answer any more than necessary. "Yeah..."

"Wow, answered just like a man!" came her biting reply.

She wasn't wrong, I am a man.

"Just clothes, nothing else?"

I wanted to say *'absolutely'* , but this sailor-suit wearing reporter will likely complain again. I glared at her, then refused to opened my mouth.

"Like today's dinner."

That was true. There was no sign of my transformation coming. I'd prefer to go home and stay indoors, but there's no food there and I wanted to have more than just water overnight.

"Natsuru-san, you cook for yourself? Whatever I shove into my microwave always bursts into flames and I get scolded by my mother."

I sympathize with her mother.

As for my cooking ability, I can make a decent curry. My remaining ability is limited to cup-ramen, but I wouldn't call that cooking; nothing to be proud of. According to rumors, Sakura-san is a very good cook. If I return to a man I'd love to confirm that.

Akane simply said "really...?" and wouldn't say any more after I had whispered that thought to her. She seemed awfully angry for some reason.

To my favor Masumi continued talking loudly, trying to decide where we should go.

"If you just want a side-dish, the shopping center's supermarket is super cheap. Let's go"

Masumi was leading. Is it human nature to follow whoever leads? We walked along in a triangle with Masumi at its vertex. Glances at us were coming from all sides; they were directed at me. Both men and women were staring. As a man walked by my body shuddered from his attention; it was so embarrassing. *'Hey, this isn't a peep show!'* I wanted to scream. But then someone would call a policeman, it's wiser to walk in silence.

Top and bottom I wore an Iron Star Academy High School uniform. My uniform wouldn't draw attention since it's a popular school in that area. Glances at me increased... but I had no idea why. If a new freshman started wearing the school uniform, wouldn't it be similar?

There was too much attention. I am not very self-conscious, but all the gazes centered on me was very distracting; I even forgot that we were shopping. Does being a woman feel like this?

"People are looking at Natsuru-san..." Masumi had a way of speaking without any form of delicacy.

"Since Natsuru-san is cool and tall, she is the center of attention. Stares are being shot her way."

Why was I being targeted? It could be my height. I was average height for a man, but a head taller than most women. Certainly the tallest of us three.

Maybe my transformation mixed parts of a man and women together... just as I was starting to develop an idea someone called.

"Hey!"

It was a man's voice. I tried to ignore it and keep walking.

"Wait," as my shoulder was gripped.

His coat was familiar, a boy from our school. I recognized his face, it was my classmate Higashida, idiot; reduced to a fool.

"Such a group? So lovely!"

Dense guy; was this a pick-up? Maybe it was casual flirtation. Higashida relaxed his expression and scoped me out; yeah, it was a pick-up.

From the badge on my collar he knew that I was also a second grade student.

Frightened Akane hid behind me. Masumi said "hey hey, stop flirting, let's go."

Higashida, however, was talking only to me.

"Hey, I also go to Iron Star Academy. Tell me your name, I'm second year student Higashida."

Why me? His tone of voice was very creepy. Being a woman at the moment gave me a completely different view of this guy. I had no idea that he talked so easily to girls, or talked so much. He could compete with Masumi for nonstop talking. I wished both would

follow Akane's example.

Higashida continued, "I'm not bad, not an otaku, I'm a normal guy." This coming from the chairman of the Nymph Club, trying to catch me. Normally I wouldn't care, but right then it would be a problem.

I shook his hand off my shoulder. How can a guy like this act in a totally familiar manner to an unknown girl? The feel of the conversation was disgusting. I had to be careful.

Higashida took out a digital camera. "My hobby is taking photos, I'd like to get one of you. Right now I'm collecting pictures of beautiful girls from Iron Star Academy High School. No problem, right?"

How could any girl fall for that lame pick-up line? It must have worked at least once though.

Masumi shouted "I... I am...?" Akane still hid behind me, powerless in fear.

I silently shook my head.

In the case of that guy, he may recognize my voice.

"I'm asking you because you'd make a lovely model. It will only take a moment, no problem, right?"

Guys must think I look lovely. From looking in the mirror at myself that first time I know how lovely I look.

"Shall we start?"

"Hey..."

"You have an astringent voice, my favorite kind."

Any girls voice is your favorite. You'd say the same to Masumi. You're trying to court the Senou Natsuru who attends the same class as you. If he ever determined who I really was, his bubble would burst and it would be a trip to the hospital for me.

I ignored him and walked away. I had to buy a meal and some clothes. I even wanted to buy my weekly manga.

I could feel the back of my neck tingling, was it a mosquito?

"Forget the food for now, lets buy clothes first." I told both my

companions. "Let's run!"

"...hey!"

"Where are you going? Don't you want to be in my photo collection? Model girl..."

Akane and I signaled each other with our eyes, excluding Masumi. Higashida could still be heard "...I want you in my collection. It's a chance of a lifetime."

Akane and I dashed of unexpectedly, Masumi quickly followed. Model your own photos.

We escaped the shopping center and made it to the front of the station. The crowds were very thick and Higashida was left far behind. However I still have to buy some women's clothes. Maybe in Ito-Yokado or Jusco? I decided to ask Akane.

"Right inside the station is a cute shop with nice clothing. Turn in right here."

I did as she said. I'd never been shopping for clothes here before. I had bought a lot of box lunches in the station basement, but they were usually stale. I jumped through the shop's front door and caught my breath. Higashida never found us.

"Well..." I looked at the store directory. The store name on the sign looked like Buddhist scriptures written in Sanskrit to my eyes.

"It is this shop."

Akane pointed to the third floor.

As we rose on the escalator Masumi was excitedly saying "clothes, clothes..." I wondered if she had done some bad drugs.

We ended up at a select shop, permeated with a sense of loveliness. The age group it targeted was high-school or a bit higher.

"Because Natsuru-san is so beautiful, I thought of this store..." Akane said while she blushed slightly.

I said "thank you..." and gave her a bow. I have no edge when it comes to fashion. I couldn't even answer a single question when it comes to brand names; even less about women's fashion. Even if the shop was named *'A Fashionable Brand popular in Zaire'* I would

believe it.

Masumi quickly danced into the store saying "I'll also choose a dress...". Akane slowly entered, and I followed timidly.

In that way I entered into a women's clothing shop the first time since I was born. Dresses were lined up from the walls to the corridors. The variety of choices was huge when compared to a men's shop. There was everything from t-shirts to skirts and socks to regrettable underwear. *'Regrettable?'*

I vacantly watched the two girls going through clothes. I had no idea what would look good from all these ladies things, even if this trip was for me.

Masumi started screaming "over here, over here..." then "Natsuru-san, this, this!" She held up a t-shirt covered by a picture of two crossed chainsaws. Over the chainsaws in bold text was *'KILL Teacher, KILL Cop'* .

"..."

"It totally suits you, please wear it to class!"

Would she take responsibility for me when I get expelled? I silently shook my head. Would it be worn under the uniform or over it?

Masumi immediately takes out another "...then maybe this."

It was a shirt showing a large Christian cross with words underneath *'an absolute swindler ↑'* written in Gothic font.

"During Christmas let's wear this and walk around town." Japanese people are mostly tolerant of religious views, but how much before it's considered rude? Should it be worn just to irritate Christians?

Before I could even shake my head Masumi showed another. "There's also one like this, it's perfect!"

'BURN! BURN! NUKE, BURN!' What's not perfect about that, heh.

It's useless, this woman can't find anything good for me.

However, why just those items. Is this shop for punk rockers and fans of death metal? Do they carry any decent clothes?

Akane joined us carrying a one piece dress. Black with thin

shoulder straps. Certainly a fashionable style worn by girls.

"This might... look good on Natsuru-san..."

I wouldn't know. I wasn't used to thinking of looking good in a dress. It was thickly embroidered in silver skulls with crossbones. How to refuse?

"I... I think it suits Natsuru-san."

Masumi showed me a jacket with the back covered by a picture and the words *'Vlad the Impaler exterminates the Turkish army.'*

Akane took out a skirt "how's this?" It was embroidered with *'come ON enteritis.'* I had to look up enteritis at home, *enteritis?* [3]

Next was a shirt with a picture of two people, a farmer holding a hoe and a tax collector. Under the picture were the words *'Don't get a lawyer to fight a child's battle!'*

Masumi held up a jacket with a picture of a Tokugawa Shogun riding a motorcycle and holding up his sword overlaid on a picture of a richly colored flame-red phoenix in flight. The back had the text *'I AM SHOGUN, HAHAHA!'* the front had smaller letters *'I. Tokugawa'* . [4]

It seemed out of character for a girl like Akane to like clothes in these styles, but, if you think about it, for a girl with a hobby of Entrails Animals it must be fitting.

These avant-garde clothes were giving me a terrible headache. To think that Akane and Masumi shared a passion for this style let me see how girls from different years and such opposing personalities could have become friends. I could understand that, but why involve me in it, this isn't my style.

I felt like I was being pressured to buy wares from competing Israeli street merchants. I gravely yelled, "stop shopping!"

The result was me looking at the faces of two shocked girls.

"Shopping... you don't... you want to stop?"

"I'm just looking for 1 thing, this much... If I go much further I'll die!" It felt like the truth.

I left the store in silence and Akane followed without any

complaint. Masumi held up a skirt printed with *'Touch Freely!'* on the back. "Wear this, at least wear this!" she cried. Wearing something like that would attract the worst kind of human fungus.

After all, we were supposed to be headed to the supermarket, then to the shopping district. To all appearances we should look like side-by-side girls, and actually we were.

"Hey you" lightly came a man's voice, but it wasn't Higashida.

Three wannabe-jocks were standing there.

"We're going to karaoke, but we need more people. Do you want to join us?"

That was fishy. Most likely they couldn't afford to enter on their own.

They were wearing shirts hand-dyed to look like soccer uniforms from Milan Italy. Western printing was covering the snake logo. Their eyes were darting nervously.

I am currently a woman. It can be assumed what would happen if all of us were alone in a closed room.

One of them held Akane's arm. "The karaoke room is just over there."

"...it's..., I won't go."

"Don't be so cold. It'll just be us dudes and you three."

An idea, likely from thinking of Higashida, comes to mind, and I tug Akane's sleeve. "Once you have transformed..."

"It's... but because Masumi-chan is here." I hadn't thought of that.

"That lovely daughter needs to come too." Meaning me. That talk came from one of them with Mohawk hair that made me think of a white leghorn chicken.

I hesitated, trying to think of a comeback that a transformed-Akane would say, "Hey!" My arm was taken and he wet his lips with his tongue.

"Best to stay away bastard. You'll fall one-by-one." Chicken head was startled by a man's voice coming from 'girl' me.

"As far as going with you tone-deaf bastards... I'd rather give you something to keep the crap in your bowels company." As something hard was pressed against his belly.

"This amateur..." I pushed harder.

"Don't open your mouth or I'll stuff it with the skin I peel off your back." I gave him a powerful stare.

The three glared back at me. Chicken head glanced down to see what was in my hand.

"Hey! Look down and die!"

"...crap!" he spewed out of his mouth as they all ran away.

I put the lighter back in my pocket. I had started to regret bringing it, because it was a bit uncomfortable, but it came to be surprisingly useful.

"This is what girls deal with, crude pick-up attempts?"

"I... I'm not always being picked-up..."

"But?"

"It's because Natsuru-san is beautiful."

"Definitely, Natsuru-san is gorgeous. Men will flock to her," Masumi loudly agreed.

I was happy to hear their praise, but had strongly mixed feelings about it.

"Impressive, you're strong." came a familiar voice from a different direction, along with an instant headache.

"I've been watching. Those jocks are notorious but you drove them off with ease! The look on their faces..."

"...so" what else could I say.

"So, I'll take photos now. Also with her." He pointed to Akane.

"..."

I stealthily quickened my pace and somewhat forcibly pulled

Akane's hand.

"Wait... just a single picture."

I looked over my shoulder and he was starting to catch up.

"Get lost!"

Higashida had a wide-eyed open-mouth expression, but he stopped advancing.

"Great one Natsuru-san. He wasn't getting your hint."

"Natsuru-san... will... your friend be alright?"

"Yeah, he's the same as a bird, he'll forget everything in a minute."

Higashida and I are a pair of guys from boy's year 2 class 4. Best highlight of our current year; 70% of the class never finished the Japanese History homework a month ago. Our teacher fainted with his mouth opening and closing like a goldfish. The next day he led class with preaching, crying and tearing out his hair; I found the memory to be pretty refreshing. Of course I was part of that 70%.

"...forget that, let's eat there!" Masumi jumped up and down pointing straight ahead.

"It's over there. Across the pedestrian overpass near... WHOA!"

Masumi yelled so loudly I jumped.

"What... What?"

"Natsuru-san's wrist is sparkling!"

Although it is not a wrist but a bracelet, seemingly she was convinced that my wrist itself was emitting light.

"Do your veins glow, like an angler-fish?"

I smiled, I would have laughed, but it wasn't a laughing matter.

("Natsuru-san, this is serious...!")

Akane's face paled at the indication that I would start transforming from female back to male.

Although I'm glad to return, the location is a problem. Transforming in a high-traffic area would be a sex-change show. Besides that, Masumi was still with us. I'd most likely be shipped off to a zoo or research laboratory for in-depth study.

("Akane-san, become a Kämpfer!")

("Yeah... but Masumi... If I was to...")

I pleaded to Masumi "I'm sorry... a little."

I dashed and dove into the underground parking entrance. Akane was flustered, but followed close behind.

White luminescence wrapped my body as I went running down the stairs. I can't remember how many steps I descended, but when the light stopped I had returned to a man.

"Oh no..."

I wasn't sad, just a bit disappointed at the location and bad timing.

I sat on the stairs. Akane stared at the ground.

"Did anyone notice?"

"No, but..."

"There was someone?"

"Well... I just felt... someone was watching."

She sounded timid as ever, but the tone of her voice was dead serious.

I looked up towards the street and caught glimpses of passers-by. None of them were looking towards us.

"When?"

"For... for a long time. Since the department store."

I pressed the back of my neck. When I was a Kämpfer, I was feeling on edge. Was it because someone was watching me? Was it the person we fought? Did they know Akane is my partner? If they followed and watched as I transformed, they'd know that I changed from a girl to a boy...

I was trying to think. When we fought in the library, I never saw our enemy's face.

"...let's get out of here," I said to Akane.

"If we leave, Masumi-chan is still there."

I wasn't thinking straight. I quickly hid under the stair landing just as I heard Masumi's voice.

"Where'd you go?... I finally caught up with you. Where is Natsuru-san?"

"Uh, er... she left!"

"Why! Why did she leave?"

"Yeah... she gave her apologies to Masumi-chan."

I never said that, but she had to be polite.

"She didn't say where I could see her again?"

(Ugh, don't tell her anything!)

"Hey, how did she leave? Isn't this a parking lot?"

"How did... the reason... motorcycle, she rode a motorcycle out..."

"Wow, ultra-cool! She... I want a ride! Which way did she go? I've got to get a ride!"

So, I have a motorbike, and old enough for a valid license. Akane was getting too far off with this. Before long I was a racer, and soon I'd be a fighter pilot.

"Oh, let's go home ... Hmm, I wonder where Natsuru-san went to eat."

Although I could finally leave, the outcome wasn't great. It was going to be cup-ramen again. My descent into malnutrition steadily progressed.

Back on the Boy's Side

I carefully made my way back home without any incidents or attacks. At home I couldn't stand listening to Harakiri-tora, so she spent the night in the crowded closet. I wanted to have a long quiet sleep.

The next day, to avoid getting stuck in a rut, I ran to school. I got to school early and a classmate said "what happened, did hell freeze over?" I responded with my middle finger; violent-Akane's attitude was rubbing off on me too much.

When classes were properly finished I quickly got ready to go home. Why? Simple, I had taken a break, but that night my plan was to open a can of whoop-ass on Harakiri-tora, the ringleader of my troubles. I will make her take responsibility.

As I was formulating my plans I heard a too-familiar voice.

"Senou!..." It was Higashida.

His face showed no recognition from the day before. Honestly?

"I'm about to leave, is it fast?"

"I have business."

Just like the day before, he put his hand on my shoulder. Again, I shook it off.

"Take a nap, then let's go shopping in Tokyo. It's something you'll like."

"Let me guess, you're going to buy special paper for printing out camera pictures."

"Close, I'm going to a print shop to get pictures of a girl that were secretly taken. For friendship sake, I'll give you a discount price."

"No need."

I have to resist, even if it's a picture of Sakura-san, which I would

enjoy. Higashida's artistry is taking voyeuristic pictures which he then sells at school. I don't want to be punished as an accomplice, it's best to keep away.

"Don't be so cold. Yesterday I found an undiscovered beauty of Iron Star Academy. The pictures I am having developed should be ready."

"What... who is this girl?"

"I don't know her name I just ran across her on my way home. As the chairman of the Iron Star Academy High School Nymph Club I'm shamed that one so cute was never seen."

No, you've seen her, it was me.

Of course I didn't explain the situation. I just silently turned away and returned to my preparations to leave.

Higashida kept right on talking. "You're being quiet and unsociable. She is incredible. Some big guys tried a pick-up line, but they were rejected and driven off ruthlessly."

"Sounds like they deserved it."

"Idiot, they were bold and gave a manly attempt. I'd like to see Natsuru do better."

Same goes for him.

"It was amazing to be abused by her; being yelled at, threatened, then she disappeared."

"..."

The propensity of this guy is beyond belief. I wouldn't want the true identity of that girl to be exposed.

"I'll sell you a picture of this goddess, I know you'll want it."

"I'm tired."

"Don't be so cold. I'd trade you for a picture of Kondou Mikoto-san."

My eyebrows lowered.

"Ask her for one."

"My request is ignored. I rely on you."

"Even I don't know when she's coming back."

The girl just mentioned, Kondou Mikoto, used to live near me. You could call us childhood friends. She's a year younger than me and would be in first-year high-school, except she's on a leave of absence. Her parents travel all over the world, and Mikoto was pulled along.

She is lovely and strong-willed, and may model for Higashida. I tried to say so, but he is just looking to put a check-mark in his notebook next to her name.

"You're only happy when you're taking pictures of girls."

"It's my hobby. It's a thrill to be looking through a telephoto lens from a hidden spot at the girls swimming in the pool."

He'll be arrested someday, and I'll have to testify against him saying *'he's done many things like this before.'* It may benefit the world.

"Speaking of girls, did you hear anything about the disturbance in the library yesterday?"

I was shocked, it's unlike him to change the topic away from photographing girls.

"Huh, like what?"

"I heard it was a dispute; more importantly, between girls!"

This guy is very quick to spread rumors.

"A quarrel between 3 or 4 girls."

"What was the quarrel about?"

"Nobody knows, but they knocked over a large bookshelf. The school board is in a fuss about it."

"Hmm."

I was pretending indifference as much as possible; give no clues. If I was careless and slipped in the least, the rumors would reach Argentina by tomorrow.

"Have they found the people responsible?"

"They ran away before anyone could see who it was. I don't blame them for keeping quiet."

"True." I had to concentrate not to look as relieved as I felt.

"By the way, where were you during lunch yesterday? Oh yeah, I remember you went with that girl you met at the station... the one waiting for you in the hall..."

Crap, "...hey, the fight was between women, I'm a man."

"So, did you see anything or not?"

"No, nothing," I lied. I was one of the guilty parties, but there's no way I'd tell him that.

I finished my conversation with Higashida. More time had passed than I thought. Even though my anger has dissipated somewhat, I was still in a hurry to get home and punish Harakiri-tora.

"I'm leaving."

"Not joining me..."

"I think you can handle it."

"You'll miss out on a deal for the treasured photos."

"I'll pass."

I walked quickly. I didn't want to get caught up in Higashida's hobby again now that we had mentioned photos.

As I was about to go through the door out of the classroom I suddenly stopped. Higashida ran into my back.

"Hey, why'd you stop."

I ignored him. There was a girl in front of me.

"That..." came Akane's weak and timid voice. She had been waiting for me.

"That, you have business with me, right?"

"It is..."

"What?"

"Eh... ...should introduce..."

"I've met Akane-chan." I cringed as Higashida called her 'chan' but she wasn't in vicious-dog mode, so there was no comeback.

"...not me..."

She took a step back and from the other side of the corridor came another female student, waving to me.

"Natsuru-san!"

Sakura-san; it was the third time I'd seen her since yesterday. Even seeing her so frequently, my appreciation of her never diminished. A beautiful woman can't be encountered too often to enjoy.

Higashida stood behind me, astonished, since Sakura Kaede came to see me.

"Oi... oi..." as he grabbed my uniform. He seemed flustered, but I am used to talking with Sakura-san.

"Why, that person..."

As I looked behind Sakura-san I became as astonished as Higashida. Standing behind her was the student council president, third grade genius, the Iron Star Academy's perfect impeccable girl, Sangou Shizuku.

The body and face of a fashion model, sophisticated demeanor, topmost athletic ability, and nerves of steel. She has maintained absurdly perfect scores for every class. Faculty and the board of education wondered if a mistake had been made that such a perfect student would enter the Iron Star Academy. She had become the student council president as soon as she entered her first year, and had maintained an authoritarian control ever since. The girl's academy had gone from loose and carefree to the currently strict control it now displayed; the ranking of the school had risen greatly.

I whispered to Akane "hey ...does the student president have business with me?"

"Yeah..." Akane quietly nodded.

"There's some business between the boy's and girl's section, namely Natsuru-san's class, and I'm taking the opportunity to meet with representatives..."

"Why?..." It wasn't me who asked, but Higashida.

Why would the class president meet with us, four second year students. At least that's what Higashida seemed to want to ask. I silently agreed.

Shizuku had put in appearances on the boy's side of the academy previously, but no conversations ever took place and she never lingers. There had never been an opportunity for anyone to talk to her. Students even said it was easier to talk to Kaede or to be accepted to the University of Tokyo than converse with her; if you ever did talk to Shizuku-sama your life would be greatly extended.

"Shizuku-sama" is not how I refer to her, but it's the term used by an non-sanctioned club of masochist boys that *'...want to be abused by Shizuku-sama.'*

Shizuku watched me with total lack of emotion.

"Er... well..." I stammered. Anyhow, this student council presdent doesn't have spare time.

"..." the reaction was equally blank. Most likely I was being taken to identify a severed head or to my execution.

Higashida went back into the classroom muttering "camera, camera."

He left me, alone and helpless.

Since it was unavoidable, I asked "What business is it?"

President-sama unexpectedly answered. "Not me, Kaede."

Shizuku made my jaw drop. Sakura-san lowered her head and bowed.

"Oh... really?"

"Some with me also." Shizuku added curtly.

I bowed deeply. Both male and female students must respect a direct visit from the student president. Basic chores and requests would be handled by her minions. It's still not clear if she has minions.

The hallway was getting loud from the attention of having these two present. It was rare to see either of them on the boys side, but to see both was unheard of. Before long there would be a school idol photo session starting up.

"Oh, uh well."

Akane was no help, her face and eyes were aimed at the floor. In a minute Higashida would return with a camera. I pressed forward and lead all of us out of the classroom.

I guided everyone to an unused room in the boys club room building. In Iron Star Academy, extracurricular activities and facilities for them are also divided by gender. For example, a literature department would have both "boys literature section" and "girls literature section." With the limited staff available, clubs with too few members were often eliminated, leaving the assigned room empty. It made it easy to find a spare room.

Splitting the clubs between boys and girls was a big success, not even the fringe activities were breaking school rules.

We ended up in the film studies club room. In previous years the club not only watched movies but elected a manager, producer, script writer, cameraman, prop supervisor, lead and supporting actors. But the club had dwindled down to the last remaining member until last year when he graduated.

Since it had been less than a year since the club dissolved the fixtures and club materials still remained. We pulled some chairs together to sit.

It wasn't a circle that was formed, but a line of Akane, Sakura and Shizuku facing me. It was more like an interview.

"First of all..." I couldn't take the silence any longer. "What kind of business does the president of student government have with me?"

"The library at lunchtime, I think you know what I mean." Shizuku said bluntly. No excessive chat or small talk. Another of her traits that lead to her being known as 'daunting.' Well, I was one of the parties involved but I couldn't give that answer.

"I've been talking with Higashida. He's dedicated to researching for his beautiful girls club."

He had been spreading rumors that the incident was a fight between girls and one of those involved, a beautiful nymph, was targeted for inclusion by the beautiful girl society. He also knew I was going to the library that day and he may have said something, damn Higashida.

"Were you in the library?" My heart was ready to leap out of my chest. Damn him again, what did that big-mouth idiot Higashida tell her?

"Oh... that..." Akane gave me a flickering gaze. I continued to worry.

"Yes?"

"I think he... borrowed a book, or..."

"Not that."

Shizuku could smell an excuse, and she wasn't willing to listen to one.

"You are a witness, you should have come forward." She crossed her arms and stared at me.

"Ten book collections and two steel bookshelves were ruined. Although there is no desire to investigate responsibility, I need to determine if liability can replace lost property, understand? Your assistance will help reduce the student council's workload."

I was one of the parties involved. Nevertheless, Shizuku's tone was very cold and made me feel like she was scooping out my insides. Even so, a part of that feeling was enjoyable and made me understand the desires of the masochistic boys club.

"...that..." as for meddling Akane.

"Natsuru is a boy. The library disturbance were girls..."

"Weren't you also in the library?"

"Eh..."

"You were."

With those few words Shizuku sealed Akane's argument.

"As for women being involved, that is known from the students who fled the scene."

As she said that her glare never wavered from me.

"Whether it was a man or woman doesn't really matter, the result is that women caused the disturbance."

"..." Akane and I clammed up.

There was an implication in Shizuku's words. Although her expression didn't change, there was a hint of her knowing additional details. She had the upper hand and Akane and I were at a disadvantage. Was I being accused?

"If you have something to say, please do."

"..."

I had nothing I could say without condemning myself.

"Nothing to say?"

I didn't.

Shizuku stood up. The conversation was done. Did she think that Akane and me lacking anything to say was backing up her reasoning?

"I'm returning to the girls section," Shizuku said.

"Ask Kaede why she came to talk with you. She'll reveal her secret only to you... Besides, women staying too long on the boys side will confuse public morals."

With those words the student council president left without a goodbye. She simply walked out of the film studies clubroom.

As soon as Shizuku left I suddenly started to sweat.

"Whoa, that was scary." I almost shook out of my chair. "It was my first time talking with the student council president, she wore me out."

"Ah, Sangou-san is always..." Akane was also weary.

"She also attends the book committee meetings occasionally and it is a harsh thing. When there is a discrepancy in the budget no one is allowed to leave the meeting until... The committee members always give in, either to her forcefulness or her beauty."

That would be true, how would I be able to deal with her. At least I was able to spend time with...

"I'm sorry," Sakura-san said.

Why was she sorry?

"The thing is, I spoke to Shizuku-chan about the library. I said Natsuru-san was there and suddenly she wanted to go with me to the boy's side..."

That was a revelation, but more shocking was Sakura-san calling her *'Shizuku-chan.'*

Sakura-san noticed my shock. "We've been friends since we were small. I've called her Shizuku-chan since then."

"That's the first time I've heard that."

"We used to talk to each other often, but in elementary school a professional entertainment scout convinced her to go to a performing arts school. But now we're together again."

The thought of Iron Star Academy's two top beauties being close friends was enough to inflate the imaginations of any male student.

Akane's expression made me feel she knew my thoughts. If she were in fierce dog mode I'd already have a hole in my head.

"So Sakura-san, you came on an errand..."

"Oh, right!" Sakura-san sat up in her chair and corrected her posture.

"In fact, that's why I was looking for Natsuru-san in the library."

"Ah."

"It is that..." for some reason she blushed. "Just a quick word... There is something personal I want to ask you."

"Oh, uh..." Akane quietly rose from her chair. "I should... just step outside for a moment," as she opened the door.

Huh?

Sakura-san silently mouthed the words *'thank-you'* to Akane as she closed the door behind her.

"...Natsuru-san," she said formally.

"Yes," I replied in similar formality.

"The person that I've been anxious to talk about..."

She started to blush, leading me to only one conclusion. This must be a confession! She was trying to be indirect. Don't laugh, it has to be it. Why else would she say 'the person that I've been anxious to talk about'?

"Since yesterday... I cannot get that person out of my mind..."

Her face tipped down and she couldn't look directly at me. I was having difficulty hiding my smile. Hiding my smile was an unreasonable request. I was rejoicing, one of the two campus beauties was about to confess to me. If I died right then my short life would still be complete in happiness.

That would explain why Sakura-san was seeking me in the library, that was the reason. She tried to find me, but because of the disturbance she never had the chance.

It was good that I hadn't been popular. If I had been *'popular,'* the popular Higashida would have never let me be alone with her.

When Higashida hears this news he'll have a heart attack. My happiness is more important than that fool's life anyway.

"It is that I..." She was having trouble getting the words out. Take your time Sakura-san, anytime was fine with me.

"Natsuru-san, what I'd like to know..."

"Yes?"

"Who is..."

"Eh?"

"...that woman?"

My eyes were blinking with surprise and Sakura-san leaned forward.

"That cool girl who saved me, I don't know her, but Natsuru-san does, right?"

Her words struck me right between the eyes, hard. Somehow I managed a reply.

" *'Cool girl'* ... do you mean the violent..."

"Not the one with the gun, the nice girl, the one who helped me."

"Eh?"

"She was wonderful and cool, but not very talkative."

"She... she is..." my head was confused. If it wasn't Akane-san there was only one other person there.

"Please introduce me to her... her name is Natsuru-san!"

Sakura-san's eyes were beaming with joy. In contrast I fell off my chair, lost for words.

Natsuru and Natsuru

"A-ha ha ha," Harakiri-tora laughed like an old woman.

"Another of your misfortunes!"

The stuffed toy was thrown into the trash bin as a substitute to an answer.

"Please stop the garbage treatment, it's so childish."

"Quiet!" I yelled toward the trash can.

"Sakura-san, she frustrates me, but I just can't get angry at her! Beautiful Sakura-san open your eyes!"

"But she likes Natsuru-san, right?"

"...as a woman!"

I picked up the trash can and turned it over. Harakiri-tora fell out along with the waste paper. I picked up the stuffed toy and violently brought our faces together.

"There are two reasons why I'm shocked and angry!" I said imitating Akane's fierce-dog mode.

"One is that Sakura-san found the person she desires. The second is that Sakura-san fell in love with a woman!"

In the past Higashida had said *'Sakura-san has refused all invitations by men. The rumor is she must be a lesbian.'* Of course I took it as a joke, while both Higashida and I laughed. I was completely shocked that the rumor turned out to be true.

"And it's all your fault!"

"How does that add up?"

"The whole situation wouldn't be so confusing if you didn't turn me into a woman! It's no good even apart from her fondness for women."

Harakiri-tora wriggled its way loose from my hand.

"Don't discriminate. Be more liberal and accepting in your thinking."

"I want her to be charmed with me as a man!"

"But Natsuru-san the man has no charm."

I tried to kick the stuffed toy in the style of a free-kick, but it was too quick, all my foot caught was air.

I remembered the blurry events after the recent confession(?) in the clubroom. I fell off my chair half-conscious, being nursed by Sakura-san, saying *'the cool girl who helped me.'* She had continued, *'even though she wore our school's uniform, I've looked everywhere and can't find her.'* Even though the person she was looking for had just swooned before her eyes.

Thinking over the story leading up to then made me want to cry. The conversation at the time was like skillful warriors battling. It took all my talent not to expose the identity of her new favorite woman.

I could lie to myself, that I was important to Sakura-san and that she liked Natsuru-san. But the Natsuru-san she liked wasn't me, and I'm not prone to imaginations of megalomania. Even if it would be a white-lie to myself.

Even though my emotions were at odds with themselves, Sakura-san asked me *'please keep this a secret. Rumors of homosexuality spread very quickly.'*

I agreed while not being totally conscious yet. There could be no other answer than *'yes'* when asked a question by such a beauty. She also pulled out my consent to *'introduce me to that woman.'* It's a wretched story, but I had no ability to refuse.

How on earth could I manage an introduction? She and I share one body. Damn, I had to go to Harakiri-tora for advice; I didn't get *'how can I help?'* No, from the start I got laughter.

Even with time Harakiri-tora didn't stop grinning or laughing. Originally the stuffed toy had a sewn on faint smile, but her huge smile couldn't be hidden.

"How about meeting while you're a woman?"

"I could do that but my voice would still be a man's voice. I'd be exposed."

"...being exposed - that's inconvenient?"

"I would be despised... with my size how could I be seen other than a weirdo with a transvestite hobby?"

No, since Sakura-san is kind, she wouldn't despise me. But certainly my rank would fall drastically from *'a junior high acquaintance.'* In a worst-case scenario, she would *'avoid him as much as possible.'*

"To top it off, I'll hurt Sakura-san who has been yearning to meet her 'cool girl'. Another reason for her to hate me."

I rolled around holding my head. If someone saw me they wouldn't hesitate to call for an ambulance, most likely a yellow one.[5]

Harakiri-tora didn't call an ambulance. Probably because her cat-like cloth hands couldn't dial a phone easily.

"I'll just give up and choose the road to being Kämpfer. Having a woman with me isn't necessary to fight."

"But to start a fight you must first be a woman."

I sat up, "can I transform myself into a woman intentionally?"

"If you increase your skill a bit, you could."

"Skill?"

"Oh - you've seen others do it Natsuru-san, do you still think it's difficult?"

That's true, Akane easily transforms intentionally. I suddenly recalled I hadn't told Harakiri-tora about the attack in the library. This time the plush toy was unusually silent.

"Ho, so you finally met an enemy Kämpfer?"

"The attacker was powerful, and stayed hidden. I never saw who it was."

"Sounds like an experienced fighter, this is serious."

"Fast and forceful. Would the attacker have been a woman?"

"There's no doubt."

"She's also an Iron-Star student?"

"I'm certain of it. Kämpfer tend to gather in certain locations."

"Say what?"

"Let me put it this way. If one Kämpfer appears, another will appear to fight the first, then another to support the others and so on."

"How can you transform people so freely?"

"It's the moderator, don't you think?"

I had to think hard. This was a pain, every time I went to school I'd have to be cautious. I was at a considerable disadvantage.

Consulting Akane wouldn't help much. When she wasn't transformed she was too timid to be any help; after transformation *'kill anything that moves.'* Efficient plans would not be formed effectively with her.

"Excuse me," Harakiri-tora was saying.

"How can a stupid stuffed toy help?"

"Since you're worried how stupid am I if I have good advice?"

"Like what?"

I watched Harakiri-tora with doubt. There's no trusting her, no answers came easily, nothing but puzzles. Thinking back, the description that came with the Entrails Series toy said *'Harakiri-tora - even it's stomach is black.'*

"To start, the enemy is likely just one person. If there were two or more you would have lost."

That made sense. The only weapons we saw were two dirks[6] attached by a chain. That weapon kept us both occupied, if there were any other enemies we would have been overwhelmed.

"Should I worry about another enemy showing up?"

"Probably."

"But what chance is there of that?"

"Like I said a while ago, Kämpfer tend to gather in one area."

"I heard you, I was there."

"Well..."

"You're useless," I said harshly before I could stop myself. She made an essential point there. How could I uncover others?

"With patience and good searching, you'll certainly find them."

"The only evidence is the bracelet. Without seeing that there's no way to tell." I hit my arm where mine was firmly attached. Rolling up girls sleeves, what difference is there to flipping skirts?

Harakiri-tora thoughtfully pondered, "that reminds me." Seeing a toy with intestines spilling out, looking intently thoughtful was beyond strange.

"Look for someone like me!"

"Huh?"

"All messengers are like me..." Harakiri-tora skillfully pointed her short forefoot at herself.

"No way."

"Search for people who have Entrails Animal series stuffed animals, right? Akane-san has Seppuku Kuro Usagi. Not every Entrails Animal will be an adviser but each adviser assigned to a Kämpfer will be an Entrails Animal."

I think messenger is a better fitting word than adviser, but aside from that it wasn't a bad idea. Not as direct as checking bracelets but easier to talk about.

"So why only look for Entrails Animals?"

"The moderator chose to use us. For gathering Kämpfer it's easier to use the same series of stuffed animals."

Harakiri-tora was proudly rubbing her exposed viscera. Pride in a series of stuffed toys.

"There are many series, why them?"

"Maybe because they're no longer being sold. Anyway, it's better than rolling up sleeves."

"How do you know they stopped selling them?"

"I've checked into it," I noticed my computer was turned on and a browser window was opened up on it. The window was dense with information, apparently someone had been net surfing.

"It gets boring being in this room all day. Clicking is hard, but I manage."

With those paws I bet it would be difficult.

Anyway, I was relieved. Searching for stuffed toys was a lot easier than searching for enemies through groping.

I decided to go down to the first floor and get some juice so I got up to leave.

"Oh, Natsuru-san..."

"I don't think a stuffed animal would want to join me for a drink."

"Not me, but Kaede-san would."

"Huh?"

"You're supposed to introduce the girl Natsuru-san to her."

"Ah..." I fell back. Seems I had forgotten my current troubles since the topic had changed.

Frankly speaking, solving the problem of searching for enemy Kämpfer was easier than coming up with a plan for that problem of mine.

"Ah - how am I going to make introductions?"

"Still haven't figured it out?"

"It's like I'm betraying Sakura-san, how can I do that?"

"All you have to do is present yourself to her."

"I don't want to."

"You have a better solution?"

Harakiri-tora made a faint smile. "Just try not to talk if possible. It's your only choice."

It's the only way. Sakura-san wants to meet the girl Natsuru, and I've already agreed. I'll just do it.

"Are you going to have a silent conversation..."

You're contradicting yourself dude. I have to do it even if I need telepathy.

"Now to change you to a girl's figure."

"Ugh, yeah."

"Either you ask Akane, you figure out how to transform, or you find some other Kämpfer that is willing to fight."

"I can't transform myself yet."

"That's why you'll need Akane-san to help you transform, then stay nearby."

"No..."

The stuffed toy was persuading me though. Unless I learned to do it myself, but that was... unlikely. Plus I had to become used to the figure of a woman. But to get there Akane would have to change to fierce-dog mode. When that happened I'd most likely get shot in the head. Too dangerous.

Harakiri-tora looked completely still, and said "I've said what I have to say" and fell asleep.

My brain was fried from thinking too much. Don't think about the mysterious enemy, find another ally if possible. Must introduce the girl-me to Sakura-san, but need the help of Akane to do it. I didn't have one issue that could be solved in one fell swoop.

The only good idea I had was to sleep on it... maybe tomorrow I'd have solutions.

Introductions

I went to school early and went to the library before homeroom. Higashida would say "reading for enjoyment is a contagious disease," but I wasn't going there to read. As expected Akane was manning the library services counter. She looked bored since no one was in a hurry.

"Akane-chan."

"...Natsuru-san?"

I beckoned her over to the corner table.

"Do you need something?"

I briefly explained the story from the day before, after Akane got up and left the room. She was interested and surprised at the news.

"So, Natsuru-san needs me to help become Kämpfer... ?"

"Yeah."

"...in order to meet Sakura-san?"

"I can't change on my own. At first I thought I'd refuse to make an introduction, but I already agreed to Sakura-san and I can't be cruel to her. So for now, I'll change to a girl."

Akane looked down somewhat, and looked like she puffed out her cheeks a little.

"I'm sorry to ask," as I bowed my head.

"Well... it is good... but..."

I don't know why, but she didn't seem very interested. Maybe it had to do with a girl's lifetime experiences that I was missing out on.

I was also half-hearted about the introduction. Even so, I would be glad to meet with Sakura-san any way possible, even if I had to be a woman. My feelings were more complex than tracking the orbit of a

satellite.

What we would say when we met was still unknown; or even if I could talk without sounding like a man. My head couldn't figure out a way this would turn out well.

"To transform you'll need me or..." Akane said.

"I don't know any other Kämpfer."

"But I would need... when I change I become violent." Akane slouched down.

"Well that... I understand. There's no other way I can do it, so that's why I asked."

Actually that was one of my concerns. As soon as Akane transforms it'll be *'Sakura-san want's introductions? That's a job for a Kämpfer? I'll introduce her... to a demon from hell'* . I'd have to make provision for a tool to extract her teeth from my throat.

I must have been thinking too hard and too long, Akane looked perplexed. This was bad.

Before it was too late I had to change the subject.

"I heard about some tension on the girl's side..."

"That was Masumi-chan, she was opening the door to each second-year homeroom asking *' is Natsuru-san here?...'* "

I thought I had heard a scream *'not here either!'* coming from the girl's side. Could that have been Masumi?

I involuntarily took a quick look around for her. Even though she wasn't looking for me the way I looked now.

"This morning, the student council president and one of the council members came and took care of the situation." Akane answered my implied question.

"The situation didn't take long and the student council president said it was easy."

The student council president is a piece of work, it would be a difficult thing to go against her.

"You should talk to Sakura-san about setting up introductions."

"Eh...?" Akane was puzzled.

"I'm stuck on the boy's side, so I can't do it."

"But Sakura-san and I barely know each other..." Akane slouched even more.

It was hard to believe that the fierce-dog girl and this girl could be related. One was so forceful and the other couldn't be shyer.

"Well Sakura-san and I both came to the boy's side yesterday; maybe you could request us again."

I put my hands together and begged. If Sakura-san came to the boy's side again there would be a major uproar. Higashida would faint.

Akane glowered slightly and her head barely tilted.

"Thank you very much."

She was unhappy, but nodded assent.

After school, not only was Iron Star Academy harsh in separating boys and girls in the school, they meddled in interchanges outside as well. As soon as we stepped out of the school gates it was *'keep your eyes to your own classmates, understand?'*

Between the boy's and girl's gates was a female guard with a blank stare, looking like she belonged at an internment camp. Furthermore, if caught looking at the girls too often the school has an underground torture chamber, where the student stays until he confesses. Well, the last part is how the rumor goes.

Due to that, I had ducked into a coffeehouse a short way from the school.

The shopkeeper was a retired white-collar worker. Because of its location the store primarily caters to Iron Star students. Because it was close to the school the prices were high. Because the prices were high and the guard kept a close watch on students near the school the profits were low and the owner needed to raise prices; a snowball effect it seemed.

I slowly sipped my coffee while the gaunt stare of the shop owner was upon me. With the high prices and the poor taste of the coffee, slowly sipping was all I was going to do no matter how desperate the owner looked.

A girl student hurrying inside glanced quickly my way then sat by the windows on the opposite side of the store.

Students were afraid to sit in the shop while in uniform. Although there was no official prohibition against visiting the shop while in uniform, once a uniformed student was noticed by the school guard, that student would be watched even closer. The store often had single boys waiting for female students.

Sakura-san came out of the school gate as the store owner was getting creepier.

She came straight to the store without hesitation; Akane must have gotten the message through. The store door opened and the bell rang, little swirls of dust were kicked up.

"Sorry," I called out as she was greeted by the store owner.

She looked relieved as she saw me, "oh good, did you have to wait long?"

"Not long. Do you want to take a walk for a while?"

"Yes," Sakura-san agreed.

We came out of the store, and slowly walked towards home. If the boy's side ever found out I was walking alone with Sakura-san I would be burned at the stake, tortured, then burnt at the stake again. When a teacher would find me I'd be confined and then roasted on a stake again. For now I was extremely happy, at least for this instant.

"Natsuru-san... that girl is...?"

Sakura-san asked with a sad face and my happiness ended.

"I found her."

"Truly?" Her expression suddenly lit up. I wished that expression was for me.

"She's in the vicinity, she was too shy to meet at the school." ...well

not shy so much as difficult to accomplish.

"We can meet?"

"I think you can... meet now..." I said hesitantly, but Sakura-san didn't seem to notice.

She was fidgeting and wrapping her arms around her chest, seeming nervous.

"Right now?" Sakura-san sounded hesitant.

I eventually nodded

"Yes..."

"Er, wait here a minute." I ran across the street when the signal changed.

My destination waited in an alley between two stores.

"Ya made me wait long enough!"

"Oh, it couldn't be helped."

Akane, who had become the fierce dog woman, was in a bad mood, both dazzling and sullen. I asked Akane to transform me and I waited. I remained a man though. I had learned not to be pushy with her when she is in fierce dog mode.

She stood scratching her head, flicking a pocky in her mouth.

"Ah been thinkin' a guy from da bank was watchin' me. Ah think we should move."

Truth is Akane is a stunning beauty when like this, if you can get past the murderous glare in her eyes. Perhaps the guy is a masochist, if she didn't kill him already.

"Da guy was persistent, tried ta pick me up."

"Where is he now?"

"Ah was upset."

She pointed behind her. There were several men passed out lying on their backs. Looking closer one was the chicken head guy who

tried to pick us up at the karaoke. I did take too long getting here after Akane transformed... or maybe these guys just have really bad luck.

"I have to change for Kaede."

"There," Akane directed with her head in a dignified manner.

"Don' be restless, save da crap for the rest room."

I wasn't getting through, this was taking too long.

"She's waiting for the female me."

"Ah'm not stupid. Ay get it, she's lesbian. Least you don' have ta worry 'bout syphilis."

"Hey, don't speak bad about Sakura-san!"

"Come on Natsuru, jus' let me shoot 'er. Ah'll make it quiet."

I replied in a low voice, "stop it, this isn't Lebanon, don't act like a terrorist."

"Too bad it's not Lebanon, Ah'd like it there."

I pretended not to hear. My bracelet started to glow. I couldn't worry about unnecessary things then.

The shining of the bracelet expanded and wrapped around my entire body. When it was done I had the body of a woman.

Akane ran her eyes over me.

"If ya' are really a woman remains ta be seen."

"None of your business."

"Voice is da same, finished!"

"Can't help it, I'll try not to talk if possible."

"What's da point of meetin' if ya can't talk?"

"I'm planning on meeting her only this once."

That was the conclusion of my overnight worrying. The best way to save everyone's feelings, including mine.

"Ain't that pointless? Ah've done ma part."

"I'm going to go, but please stay nearby, and stay transformed."

"Don't blame me if ya get burnt, Ah like crispy fried ribs anyway."

I began to walk slowly to where Sakura-san waited.

Although she was looking around restlessly, her eyes brightened when she saw me. That strengthened my courage.

"Ah... I am extremely thankful!" Sakura-san was very tense.

"I am Sakura Kaede and you helped me before. For that I am truly thankful."

I nodded silently, trying to show attitude, but it wasn't transmitted effectively.

"I asked Natsuru-san to introduce us. I hope it isn't an inconvenience."

I shook my head.

"That's good..." She relaxed visibly. I was glad she had piece of mind.

Sakura-san nervously continued, "that... we... somewhere..."

Rather than stay in the middle of the sidewalk, she wanted to go somewhere. We started walking in silence.

We walked along, me following and Sakura-san became more tense. It was like a parade.

Eventually she spoke up, "...I'm sorry... what's your name?"

Just like Masumi, questioning my name. Since I never gave my name it's a natural question.

I mumbled as much as possible to not be understood, "Natsuru..."

She heard me. I was a fool and an idiot; giving my real name again. Sakura-san was surprised, but that's natural.

"Natsuru-san... it's the same name as Senou Natsuru-san. He's my friend."

You've never told him he's a friend. It's the same name because it's the same person.

We continued walking. Sakura-san took a quick glance at my uniform.

"Natsuru-san also goes to Iron Star Academy."

Both still me, so still the same school.

"What class are you?"

I kept silent. I tried to keep my mind blank so I wouldn't try and talk, but it was surprisingly hard.

"That..."

"Second year," in the end I decided to just mention the grade.

Sakura-san put her hands together as if she had been praying.

"I am also a second year student; we're in the same grade!"

Actually I attend the boy's section. The tension between us was lessening though.

"I didn't know there was a person like Natsuru-san at school... you'd really stand out because... Natsuru-san is amazingly beautiful."

"It's just..." I couldn't explain much more in just a few words.

"Are you a transfer student?"

"Well..."

"You are! There must be many things you haven't seen at the school yet."

Well yeah, it's a lie, I wasn't enrolled in the women's school. Sakura-san seemed to have been convinced.

Pretending to be nonchalant, I glanced at my bracelet. *'Sparkle-sparkle,'* still no change, it was still shining.

It sounds silly to call it a conversation, but we continued to talk. Well, Sakura-san did, I listened and spoke as little as possible.

"Is Natsuru-san taciturn?"

No, I just don't want to speak.

"You're so cool and groovy!"

Huh? Why such praise, she wasn't supposed to like my quietness.

It was a fairly one-sided conversation. Mostly *'another thing you need to know,'* about the school and herself. She told me many things, a lot of things that should be kept private.

I had nothing to say; actually I did, but for that I needed the right timing.

At some point I needed to tell her *'we can't meet again'* , but how?

I needed to say it clearly, without hurting Sakura-san. I had to tread carefully and not say it casually. Not like in a drama, *'by the way, I can never see you again'* ; dramas are useless. What about news-casting, *'separated by conflict, fated not to see each other until...'* , what is this the border of Israel and Lebanon? All the ideas I was coming up with were stupid.

Because of my voice I would have to make it short, or else she'd recognize my voice as the boy Natsuru. My statement would have to be short and concise. *'Let's break up'* wouldn't work, we've never dated. *' Get lost!'* would just be hurtful.

"I'm addicted to that series..."

What?

I must have missed some of the conversation while thinking of what to say. Sakura-san noticed the question on my face.

"The Entrails Animals series, they're very lovely. Each character's internal organs are protruding here or there. Because Guillotine Zebra has no head, it's hard to imagine what her face would look like though."

As expected from Sakura-san, conversation turned to that series of plush toy. Like Masumi's preference of clothes, this was a strange hobby.

"I'd like to give you one from my collection. Now which one would fit you?"

None, because I already have one.

"I love the new Sun-burnt Lion, dealing with poor complexion rather than exposed viscera."

"Yeah,..." how could I deny it. That toy company should make Sakura-san an executive officer.

"The first series was all exposed internal organs, one is Buried Hyena. That one never sold well and finding them now is very difficult. Now I'll give it to you."

It surely must be rare. How could I accept this kindness?

In the first place this was likely the only time we would meet. I didn't want to continue this relationship but start a new one with me as a man. I was troubled, but happy also.

"Entrails Animals make great gifts. I've even given one to Shizuku-chan for her birthday."

"...?"

"Sangou Shizuku-chan is the president of the student council at school."

Huh, Shizuku also has an Entrails Animal? Do all the beauties of the world have a love of strange disturbing hobbies? That's a deep revelation!

Wait, Shizuku!?

The thoughts in my brain began to churn like the contents of a washing machine. That means...

Just then the sounds of a major disturbance could be heard ahead of us.

"What is it?"

Sakura-san tilted her head. An argument could be heard coming from the shadow of a building.

"Try saying that again!"

"Ya head is full of rotten stinkin' horseshit. Nah, horse diarrhea is jammed in and overflowing from ya skull! Dickwad! Stay away ya

piece of..."

"This woman!"

Woman? To avoid getting involved we quietly watched.

It was Akane arguing with the men who were flirting with her earlier. She was growling like a vicious dog. The men didn't seem very pleased with being given a good whaling in the middle of their attempted casual flirtation. Uh oh.

There were three guys, the leader was the Chicken-head. One of them had a yakuza-style tattooed arm, but Akane didn't care. Her eyes gave the impression of a stray dog with rabies, ready to fight a group of yakuza. I edged closer.

One man swung a fist but Akane dodged it easily. The off-balance man stumbled towards me.

My body moved on its own. I grabbed the man and tossed him easily.

"Eep," Sakura-san let out a small scream. Even the screams of Iron Star beauties are refined.

"Oh, the bitch has a friend!?" The two remaining guys spewed a legitimate question.

Yeah, I'm her partner, at least my body was moving as if I was. The fierce-dog girl was getting more agitated though.

We faced the two remaining guys, but before you could blink we had moved. When we became Kämpfer we obtained extraordinary power and speed. In less than an instant the flirtatious men were stacked up like futon cushions.

"What do ya' say now you dickwads! Teach yas to treat women dat way!"

Akane continued to yell at the men. They were unconscious, so I don't think they were listening.

She then looked at me, then behind me at Sakura-san.

'Baka-baka' I told myself. If I hung around there too long the insolent mouth of the fierce dog girl would land on us.

"Let's go..." I said to Sakura-san. I didn't want to stick around to see what Akane may say.

Sakura-san's face was the color of red wine, "Awesome!"

What!?

"Natsuru-san is groovy! A woman who can exterminate men..."

Extermination of what I usually am... and will be again once I return to normal.

As far as Sakura-san was concerned, the situation was settled. Her face was radiant. Sakura-san didn't seem to be aware of the relationship between Akane and me.

She stood next to me even though we were in the middle of the street.

"Please..."

What now?

"Please, go out with me!" she exclaimed surprisingly loud.

I almost fainted.

Good Advice

When other boys at school all say *'we have all been on dates with girls.'* I'm not included in the *'we.'*

I barely know two girls at school. I live within walking distance to school, so I never share a bus with girls. Other than the previous day when I walked to school with Sakura-san, I always walk alone. I rarely get a chance to meet girls from school.

It's understandable; I'm not proud to say, but I've never dated. To suddenly be dating Sakura Kaede was like a gift from heaven. I would be overjoyed if it weren't for the complicated situation.

I decided to develop strategies preparing for the date. I couldn't afford to ask Hagashida for advice. I had a limited idea of what staying as a Kämpfer for an extended time would involve. Akane was my only choice to rely on.

I went to the library and bowed deeply in front of Akane.

"uh... yes?..."

After I explained the situation to Akane she was clearly bewildered.

"Oh... you're asking me?..."

"You're the only one that I can depend on."

"But things like that... I... I will..."

"Please, please." I repeatedly bowed like that vintage Drinking Bird toy.

We agreed to have an emergency meeting at my house. Akane was frightened, "I'm... going to a man's house... it's my first time." I had to convince her that it was fine, but I was desperate. That's how we ended up face-to-face in my bedroom.

"Sakura-san... she... thinks Natsuru-san is cool, right?"

Akane said holding a tea cup with both hands. I may have made the

tea lazily, and even though it was such a strange topic, I had to sit properly.

"But, it doesn't seem likely..."

"What is it?" I asked.

"Uh?"

"Go ahead..."

"Oh, isn't it... I wonder... a kind of confession?"

Of course, I had never been confessed to by a girl before; let alone a girl like Sakura-san. If it were true, and if it were directed to me as a man, would have a heart attack. This was going to give me a heart attack in a different sense.

"Akane-chan, you're saying a girl falling in love with another girl?"

"Well..." she said in a dismissive way.

It was strange, every time I brought up Sakura-san, Akane got in a bad mood. I was starting to wonder if she didn't like Sakura-san.

"I'm inexperienced... I don't really understand love..."

Rather than being apologetic, she sounded more irritated. Again, it seemed like she may hate Sakura-san. I'll have to fix that, when a good chance comes up I'll tell her all the virtues of Sakura-san.

I took a piece of rice cracker. Akane's just jealous because she doesn't have someone special. She's such a nice delicate girl. I'm amazed that she becomes so violent and crude when she transforms.

"I think he should date her," came not from Akane, but Harakiri-tora. "You'll be the envy of the entire school, she's very popular. You should date."

"Oh, yeah he'll do just fine," said another voice. "There's no rule against Kämpfer dating other women. The moderator will sure be surprised - ahahahahaha!"

The wild laughing was coming from another stuffed animal. It was Seppuku Kuro Usagi that Akane had brought.

Another masterpiece of the Entrails Animal series; a black rabbit

with a seppuku dagger stuck into its abdomen. One detail was her deeply bloodshot eyes. Young children seeing her in the toy department would cry without fail. It was no wonder that it didn't sell all that well.

As soon as they had arrived, Seppuku Kuro Usagi started swearing *'so this is the dork's house.'* Followed by, *'no wonder he's an asshole.'* Akane had said, *'because I was nervous coming alone I brought her instead of a bodyguard.'* She had the fighting talk of a bodyguard mastered. She and Harakiri-tora hit it off like old friends, talking and laughing. I guess there's a sense of camaraderie among the stuffed animals.

The toy rolled around beating the floor with her short forefoot; glaring at me through one eye while laughing.

"Truth is, I'm not really a woman!"

"Like hell!"

"It's my first date with a girl, even if my sex changes first..."

"...that's one way to date Kaede."

"I'm still me even if female! It's complicated..."

An outsider's objective viewpoint would make things clear, being an involved party confused me.

"So, what happened with Sakura-san at the school?"

"Since I attend a different class, although in the boy's section... it seems she searched every girl's second grade classroom."

"And didn't find you..."

"Right."

"Masumi-chan... she's still searching, because that's the way she is... sounds like it's getting too conspicuous."

Masumi brays like a torn speaker when she yells. It could be heard anywhere.

"So... what's the... decision on the date?" Akane's voice slowly brought me back to reality.

"That's right, she said she would like to meet this upcoming Sunday."

"Are... you going?"

"Probably..." It wasn't possible for me to refuse Sakura-san. It would be useless for me to try.

"Where are you going?..."

"I haven't decided yet." I mean, I wonder if it's up to me to decide where to go. "Usually the man decides where to go, right?"

"Or just leave it to Sakura-san." Harakiri-tora said while rubbing her chin.

She stood up, her face showing an idea had been formed. "Why don't you just stand her up?"

"Idiot, because it would hurt Sakura-san."

"It's also a problem if she likes you."

"I like being liked by her. That's not the problem."

"I think Natsuru-san as a man isn't very interesting," said the hateful stuffed toy.

I wondered if Sakura-san was really homosexual. Could someone so beautiful only be interested in other girls. How could she have so many fans in the boy's section? My delusion would not fade.

I would find out on Sunday. "I don't have any choice but to meet her."

Akane brought up another valid point, "when you meet, what will you do? After all it's a date..."

I figured I'd put up ideas for a vote, "I wonder where we should go."

"Well..."

"Akane-chan, where should we go?"

"Eh..." Akane's cheeks turned bright red. "I... I..."

"For example, if Akane-chan was on a date, where would you like to

go the most?"

"Oh... for that I..."

Why did it feel like she was disappointed?

She thought for a minute, "just the movies, or an amusement park..."

"Yeah, an amusement park sounds good."

"If it's just girls... just shopping is nice... but that's different."

That's true; I'd be a girl at the time so it would be a girl's night out.

"I expect you'd be safe shopping."

"Yeah, true."

"If you feel like dressing up even more," Harakiri-tora started to say unnecessary things. "Temples and shrines would be good for a date."

Well, she and I are both high-school students, so we've both visited them during school trips. Nevertheless, it greatly amused Seppuku Kuro Usagi.

"Since temples have graveyards, it'll be like a scary movie; *'Horror Temple.'* Yeah, that'll do just fine."

Both stuffed toys enjoyed my difficulties. Harakiri-tora joined in the deep laughter.

"Even without the graveyard it may be good. Since it's an unpopular place to go you'll have less chance of being attacked."

"Who would attack us?"

"The enemy Kämpfer. If you start battling in a department store, you'll be putting others in danger also."

"Oh,..." it reminded me of the attack in the library by the mysterious enemy. There's no guarantee that another attack wouldn't come at any time. I'd also prefer keeping Sakura-san from getting involved again.

My head was throbbing.

"It's best to stay in open areas where you can watch for the enemy. Or where the enemy would stand out. At least for this date."

"Kaede seems to like odd things, so taking her to a weird place should be fine," Seppuku Kuro Usagi added.

Harakiri-tora agreed and ran with it, "maybe a sewage treatment plant. I wouldn't want to visit, but seeing it from afar..."

"A crematorium would be a good place to pass the time. You may even see some spirits departing."

"Take a nap in a quarry; though it may be a rugged climb."

"Break into a building being demolished. If you take a deep breath without a mask you can feel the asbestos."

These guys were getting on my nerves. They didn't know when to stop.

I grabbed them both, and without a word threw them into the closet and shut the door. They continued complaining from inside, *'let us out now or you'll be sorry!'* and *'Baka-baka!'* Those guys were never at a loss for words.

"I think I know what to do," I said to Akane.

"...you formed a plan?"

"Akane-chan, please come with us!"

"On your date!?"

"I still can't transform myself. I'll need your help."

She hesitated; it was understandable, "isn't that... awkward... to have a third person?"

"I'm nervous that I'll change back unexpectedly. Also, if we're attacked it would be better if you were there. You can just follow from a distance."

"Like a guardian..."

"Exactly!"

Akane didn't answer, so I began imitating the Drinking Bird again.

I think my head was getting used to being in a bowing position.
Nah, that must just be my imagination.

Notes

1. ↑ The Table of Contents labels are my own, they do not exist in the original volume.
2. ↑ Cabbage Note: Akane called Natsuru a *'pumpkin head'* in chapter 2.
3. ↑ en·ter·i·tis /ˌentəˈrītis/

   Noun: Inflammation of the intestine, esp. the small intestine, usually accompanied by diarrhea.

4. ↑ Tokugawa - Shogunate of the Edo period. Look it up on Wikipedia for more details.
5. ↑ Yellow Ambulance - a typical Japanese belief is that yellow ambulances only carry patients with mental problems.
6. ↑ Dirk - a long thrusting dagger historically used by Scottish Highlanders. Typically a single edge, occasionally with gimping along the spine, making the dull(er) edge appear to have teeth like a saw.

Chapter 4

The weather was clear and sunny. I'd call the color of the sky *'Pecan'* . Not from the nuts, but from the beautiful blue color of the box of a brand of cigarettes that Higashida buys. I'd buy the brand just to gaze at the color, but I don't smoke.

I was idly waiting in front of the Metro station, just before 10:00, right on time. I was in girl-form. Personally, I'd rather be dating as a man, but it couldn't be helped. Today, it's complicated. Perhaps my situation will stay complicated for my lifetime.

Akane was beside me, in her usual form. She was in fierce-dog mode first because I still couldn't transform myself. However, she returned to normal immediately after.

Naturally I protested, but Akane refused saying "because..." while nearly crying.

"Why?"

"...so Sakura-san and Natsuru-san can be alone."

"Huh?"

"Because it's... when I change everything I say is vulgar, everything irritates me, the whole world is at fault. I can't help but quarrel, even with you..."

"But if Akane-chan isn't transformed I could change back to being a man at any time."

"Then even Sakura-san will want to shoot you."

That would be troublesome. She couldn't be persuaded and remained in her original form. I buried my head in my hands.

"If I change back in the middle of my date with Sakura-san, it's too terrible to imagine."

"Sounds like a good time to pray," said the irritating Harakiri-tora.

"God may grant the prayer, but I doubt the moderator would care."

I deeply regret bringing her out, but she pleaded to get out of the boring room.

"Don't you have a way to extend the transformation, a drug or something?"

"Like I said before, the only way is to gain experience."

"Added together I have about a day of experience."

"That's just,..." she shook her head indicating it wasn't good. Crap!

"Just try it when you need it. If it doesn't work, the worst that can happen is you get a hole through your head." That came from Seppuku-kuro-usagi. Akane brought her along because it had complained so noisily.

"You'll get it eventually if you keep trying, there's no predicting it. That's all Harakiri-tora was saying."

"Just keep to positive thinking. If anything happens run and hide."

That's easy to say.

Keeping my mind focused on not transforming may not be enough. Plus it's rude to be preoccupied while dating, positive thinking aside. Akane was slouching and silent. She had Seppuku-kuro-usagi in one arm and Harakiri-tora in the other. Like a doll collector.

"It's OK," I gave up, "I'll date Sakura-san the way things are."

"I'm sorry..."

"Akane-chan, you need to hide somewhere."

She replied, "yes..." in a low voice. As she left the stuffed animals said "keep praying for favor," and "even if you fail you can still laugh about it."

Then I was alone. The sunlight was shining and I watched herds of people exiting the station. Wondering how many of them were in a situation like mine; none I bet. Do high school boys that become girls when they wake up in the morning accumulate in large numbers? However, there may be Kämpfer in the crowds. Although not likely, I was told that there is a tendency for Kämpfer to appear near others. It's bound to happen before too long. After all, Akane and I were already the target of one enemy.

"Sorry to keep you waiting."

I was back to reality. Sakura-san was smiling in front of me. She looks good in her uniform, but a short skirt and a short sleeve top suit her very well; she was lovely.

"I'm sorry, were you bored?"

I shook my head. I could think later, now wasn't spare time.

"I worried about what clothes to wear. But I couldn't be late for my first date with Natsuru-san."

It's understandable; I also fretted about what to wear.

Sakura-san was looking at the clothes I was wearing.

"I've only seen you in your uniform, you always look cool, even in plain clothes."

I was wearing denim jeans with a wide belt over a thin shirt. On my neck I wore a silver necklace. They were my own clothes, men's clothes. No women live at my house, so there's no women's clothes. I didn't have time to go buy anything, so I did what I could. The shirt was tight around my chest and my ass barely fit in the jeans. I borrowed the necklace from Akane, she said it was needed.

I had to plan for an outfit that wouldn't be a problem if I transformed. A sailor suit uniform would be very odd to wear on a date. There was no way to tell when or where I would need to transform, or what would happen to my clothes when I did. If I become naked, it would be very hard to slip away in Japan. Akane was carrying a spare clothes just in case. Oh, what a thrilling idea for a first date.

"Shall we go?" Sakura-san said.

I never asked *'where are we going?'* I wonder if she would have told me.

She already had tickets. I glanced back nonchalantly and saw Akane with a stuffed toy in each arm, battling with an automated ticket machine. She had to set Harakiri-tora down to gain the upper hand.

We passed through the ticket gate and went to the platform.

Akane was still struggling to get through the automatic gate while

holding the two stuffed animals. She had to set one down again. I was wondering how I could hold up the train from leaving, but when I looked at the smile on Sakura-san's face all I could think of was my future happiness. I'd be even happier if I wasn't a girl though.

"I'm so happy..."

I looked at her, what a coincidence.

"...being together, you know?" Her cheeks were red with embarrassment.

"I've been looking forward to having fun today. I'm thrilled to be on a date with Natsuru-san."

I couldn't help but look around to see if people would react to two girls *'dating.'* The train pulled in, and it was very crowded. After waiting for the train to empty we boarded. The train was half empty then, so we were able to get good seats.

"Where...?" I started to ask.

"...if you don't mind, I thought we'd see a movie."

Movie, that sounded good.

"I've been looking forward to it, but it's just a screening. Unless you're not interested."

I agreed. Recently I'd only seen a few movies, Hollywood or Studio Ghibli, and those were video rentals. It's not that I dislike theaters, but I rarely think of going. After a short time it was time to get off the train. We got off a few blocks from the center of Tokyo. The area was being redeveloped and a new cineplex had just been built.

Sakura-san tugged my arm, "this is it."

There was a big sign *'A Poet's Love.'* A romance film, perfectly suited for a date. Sakura-san purchased the tickets. It felt odd to have her pay and she must have seen it on my face.

She said, "...since I invited you."

She handed the tickets to the woman behind the velvet ropes and we walked in. We went past the entrance for *'A Poet's Love.'*

Huh?

The door we walked towards had a large sign *'Entrails Animals - The Bloody Prison Gates.'*

"Entrails Animals became a movie! I've been looking forward to it and knew I had to bring Natsuru-san. It's early, but let's go in."

She led me by the hand into the theater. The room was almost empty. The film was so poorly promoted that even *'free'* tickets may not bring people in. We sat in the middle of the front row. Akane came in and sat towards the back. Even with her there it made five customers, no more than could be counted on one hand.

Sakura-san showed me a pamphlet she had purchased. The main sales pitch was *'Resuscitating CPR for the unpopular Entrails Animals series.'* At least one vendor appeared to have been deceived to think the series was coming back.

By the time the previews started there were enough people to need a full two hands to count. The story was a mess; a detective story with the Entrails Animals descending upon the Edo period and removing the villain's internal organs to set things right, sort of. But about halfway through the movie that story changed into an alien-armored-tank-monster possessed by an evil soul... if I could understand what I was seeing. Sakura-san, however, was engrossed, staring at the screen.

"It's interesting."

I couldn't quite agree though, did I miss something?

On screen the *'Entrails Animal Fighter Plane'* was battling the monster which, naturally, was flying about the castles of the Edo period while trailing its intestines.

"Well... a little."

"...it is. Very few people understand the fun of Entrails Animals. I'm glad Natsuru-san is enjoying it."

Enjoyment might come when the movie is done. By the end of the movie it had become a story where the Edo town is rescued through a game of volleyball. The enemy was a group of surgeons trying to place the entrails back into their respective abdomens. How can I not think the doctors are right?

Sakura-san's profile is still beautiful even in a dimly lit room. However her empathy is clearly sided with the Entrails Animals and her expression is mortified whenever a surgeon's scalpel appears on screen.

Someone entered the theater, likely someone early for the next showing. On the screen the surgeon was made to suck on LSD and the characters all turned to psychedelic colors worked through with distorted CGI. Maybe this was worth the ticket.

I glanced at my arm and my heart jumped. My bracelet was glowing, a signal that I would transform soon. Too soon and acid wouldn't be needed to surprise Sakura-san. Finding herself seated next to a man when the lights turned on, she'd scream for the police.

I looked back to where Akane was seated. I beckoned to her excitedly, but she didn't notice. She was staring at the screen. Oh my God, she's also a fan of Entrails Animals; at a time like this! The bracelet was flashing faster, this was no joke. Just as I prepared to run the blinking stopped. I hurriedly checked my body and I was still a girl. I never went back to being a man.

I was relieved, out of the woods, but why? Harakiri-tora told me I wasn't experienced enough to control it myself.

I leaned back in my chair and relax. The movie came to its climatic point and children yelled *'Our Heroes, the Entrails Animals!'* There had been no children in the movie, even for a second, until then.

What's up with that?

After the movie Sakura-san and I went outside. She said, "It was really interesting. It held me in suspense!"

You could say that. The *'cattle mutilation'* scene where the Entrails Animals exchanged internal organs while screaming was certainly interesting. The images were disturbing enough I had started to sweat. Soon I was sweating trying to unravel the mystery of why I hadn't transformed. If I didn't have the skill to stop it... I couldn't let my guard down.

"Are you hungry?" Sakura-san pressed her stomach. "There is a famous pasta shop. Let's go."

The Italian restaurant had a green sign over the door. I had never heard of it, so it probably wasn't a restaurant chain. Even though it was lunchtime there were few customers and we were able to be seated immediately. The waiter asked our order and Sakura-san chose the shiitake and cod roe spaghetti. I picked a pasta soup.

Akane came in and also ordered. She still had the stuffed toys. The waiter gave her a strange look, but didn't say anything.

"It was fun," Sakura-san said. "Being on a date with Natsuru-san is like a dream come true. I have never..." she looked down and her cheeks flushed brightly. Apparently she didn't have any dating experience either. It seems we both do now... if you can call this a date. The ordered food came and we ate in silence for a while.

I finished first.

"I think... that..." she stopped to take another bite, "Natsuru-san is... interested in men...?"

I denied it by slowly shaking my head, after all I'm not gay.

"Really? I'm glad..." Sakura-san clearly showed relief, "...from the first time I saw Natsuru-san... That first time, I'll never forget. Last night I dreamt that..."

Without looking up she clearly said, "Would you continue dating me?"

My face was stuck looking like the Toei Animation logo[1]. It finally came; I had gotten a love confession from Sakura-san. Is there anyone more fortunate in the world? However, why did I have to receive it while I was female?

I Looked at Sakura-san, she was motionless in anticipation. It was as is a barrier was surrounding the table blocking all sound from the other tables. What should I do?

To start with, it was my first time a woman confessed to me. I had thought it would be like it is in games or novels. You Know, under a tree a girl says *'I like Natsuru-san,'* and I reply *'I like you too.'* I thought a real life confession would only be slightly different.

In truth when I was confessed to my face turned pure white, I couldn't think clearly, and my eyes were fixed straight ahead.

I was in the form of a woman when she said it. I was interested in a heterosexual relationship with her. Do they call this a *'lily'* or *'lesbian'* relationship? Either will do. More important than that Sakura-san's entire body was bright red. She was waiting for a reply. The ball was in my court.

"That...," I reduced my voice as much as I could, "me... why?

Sakura-san's face was still lowered as she answered, "Natsuru-san is strong, silent, cool and her voice is low and husky... I've yearned for such a person so long that it hurts."

'Silent' is just so my voice won't give me away. Even if I change back to a man my voice will stay the same.

"Sorry, among girls it may be strange, but I like all of Natsuru-san's virtues."

Now what? She invited me on this date. She confessed, if I'm a man I'd give a straight answer. But right then I wasn't a man. The answer is either *'yes'* or *'no'* like the check boxes on old questionnaire postcards, except this is a verbal answer. There is only room for yes or no.

I want to return the confession while I'm a man, then the answer would be a definite *'yes.'* I had no idea when I would return to my original form, but my essence is still a man. I took a slow, deep breath. Two choices, what do I choose? Actually there's a third way, "...excuse me a minute." I stood up and walked to the bathroom. I needed time to think and clear my head.

In the corner of my eye I could see another person also walking towards the bathroom. I ignored it and almost went into the men's room. I changed direction towards the red sign[2].

Inside the women's restroom was a beautiful washstand. The room seemed unusually clean and pure when compared to the typical men's bathroom. It was an alien territory to me. Since I've never seen the men's room here it may also be clean, but it just felt like a different world.

The door slowly opened and Akane came in with a stuffed animal in each arm.

"Akane-chan..." I started without any prelude, "she confessed, what am I going to do?"

It was the stuffed animal in her left hand that answered, "Ahahahaha, so clueless. Hey Natsuru, I'll tell you what you can do."

Seppuku-kuro-usagi is so much fun, I think everyone needs one.

"Like what, more positive thinking?"

"Those are great soothing words! Did they help?"

It's no use, I had to ignore the rabbit and ask Akane.

"Don't you think it's better in this situation to give her a proper answer?"

"As for that... probably... I think so?" Akane's answer came with decreasing confidence.

"A *'yes'* is more delightful?"

"... a *'no'* , makes someone very sad..."

That was such a girly response, but a man would feel the same. It's hard to have love denied. However, I want the response that solves all the issues. Most importantly I don't want to hurt Sakura-san, but for that I would have to date her in the form of a woman. She may never become chummy with me as a man... Each of us are insects, and one is about to be squished.

"There's no such thing as a perfect solution, hahaha!" said Harakiri-tora. "To gain you must sacrifice. To get such a beautiful girl is it such a high price to pay?"

Easy choice for you. To be preached at by a stuffed toy; the same stuffed toy that turned me into a girl. "That's a good question."

"What?"

"I'll change back to a man and tell her Natsuru the woman went on ahead..." at the moment it seemed like a great solution. But I grabbed Harakiri-tora's head and said, "it's because of you I may hurt Sakura-san, this unnatural situation you put me in."

"Don't you have another choice?"

I was too angry at the stuffed toy, such an opinionated fellow.

"It's okay..." I rinsed my face in the sink, "let's go back to the seat."

"You're not... giving her an answer...?" Akane asked.

"No, I'll just delay some more as best I can."

It had to be postponed, I was too indecisive, no wonder I'm not popular with girls. I came out of the bathroom and there were even fewer customers than when I had entered. Sakura-san was no longer at our table instead...

"Welcome back. Took you long enough."

Student council president, Shizuku, was calmly smiling.

I was confused, I was only gone for a moment, is it the wrong table. No, where Sakura-san had been sitting moments ago there was Shizuku.

"Please take a seat. Let's talk."

The pasta dishes were gone and only glasses of water remained. I sat down.

"Looks like you were finished, was the food good?"

Shizuku's hair was black but was glowing brightly somehow. A stuffed animal was on the table in front of her. Was it an Entrails Animal?

"I have business with you Mr. Senou Natsuru."

I was shocked again, how could she know me while I'm in a girl's form? Her pupils were shining and flickering, she obviously could perceive my true character clearly.

"Don't be surprised. I've know who you were and what you've been doing from the start. I've had my eye on you."

I felt a chill down my spine, how much did she really know? She slowly rolled her sleeve up her right arm. I could see the same

bracelet as mine, only glowing red.

"I am also Kämpfer, your enemy."

My body moved on its own. I kicked my chair over and flipped onto my belly on the floor. The Kämpfer within me reacted automatically.

"Don't be hasty," Shizuku said. I stopped mid-way onto my feet. "I'm not here to fight, unless necessary. It would have been easier in the cinema."

"You followed...?"

"You should thank me. You would have changed back to your original form if I weren't there."

I must have been careless. She was there and I didn't notice at all. Childhood friends used to call me *'oblivious.'* She motioned me to sit and I did.

"Join us," she said to Akane who came up behind me.

I was reminded of the meeting in the film lab clubroom earlier, just a bit bloodier.

"I got Kaede to leave since I don't think she would understand our conversation."

"Says the student council president..."

"I'm fine with *'Shizuku.'* "

I didn't hesitate to change the tone of the conversation, "Shizuku-san, are you against us?"

"As I said, I'm an enemy Kämpfer. As you can tell by my red bracelet."

"...who attacked us at the library?"

"I did."

As soon as the words came out I felt a thirst for blood on my right side. Akane's body had changed instantly and the vicious dog woman was there. My transformation takes time, this was faster

than the blink of an eye.

"Dickwad, what are ya trying to pull? If ya wanna fight Ay can bury ya here." Akane shook her arm and a pistol appeared.

"Think da brains in this dickwad's head are as red as er bracelet? I'll tell ya in a second." As she pulled back the hammer on her pistol.

Reserve isn't in Akane's vocabulary. Even in a restaurant she wouldn't hold back. She held a deep grudge regarding the library incident.

Shizuku didn't seem to care though, "such a violent person, gives a bad name to Kämpfer."

"Say dat again..."

Under the table something was sparkling.

It was a large dagger, a dirk. The dirk was on a chain aiming at Akane's abdomen.

"My sword or your gun, which do you think is faster?"

Shizuku glanced at me. Another dirk had been aimed at me for a while.

"Natsuru-san is the odd one."

Since it was obvious to her that I didn't want to fight, I was thankful for her withdrawing her sword. At least that was my hope. Nevertheless she kept the dirk aimed where it was and began to talk.

"I've been wanting to talk. This looked like a good place to avoid a fight."

"You can meet us anytime at school." Akane words were tinged with hate.

"In order to meet you would transform. There are already three people at the school who observed you and are still looking for you."

I retorted, "the president hasn't transformed."

"I have," she said as she raised her long hair. The inner side looked

like liquid silver, constantly changing.

"Transformations come in a variety of types and strengths. Sex changes, character changes, or subtle changes such as mine."

Although I hadn't known about that, she made it sound very natural.

"Kämpfer have a tendency to congregate in an area... you probably knew this. Therefore, it shouldn't be surprising that I appeared before you."

"We were suddenly attacked yesterday. To me it seems normal to be surprised."

"It's been two years since I became Kämpfer. You showing up was a surprise."

That was news. In this industry she is very much my senior, how common that is I wouldn't know.

Akane was bored, "get to the point, I just got here and it's already painful."

"I also have other errands."

"Then say it faster. There's so much crap going in my ears my eyeballs are starting to rot."

"What common people, they are so unrefined," said a shrill voice coming from the stuffed toy on the table in front of Shizuku.

Belonging to Shizuku, Kanden-yamaneko, an electrocuted wildcat, was obviously struck by lightning. The tufts of hair were formed into points and of course the entrails were exposed in the style of the series.

"The impoliteness committed in front of Shizuku-sama is surprising. You could finish it quickly with your swords."

"Look, in spite of the Nana Mizuki[3] voice, I'm bored rotten as well," said Seppuku-kuro-usagi in Akane's arm.

Come to think of it, the black rabbit sounded like a sharp-tongued version of Yukari Tamura[4].

"Ohoho! what a disrespectful way to speak. Shizuku-sama is

effective at dealing with dirty mouths."

"Normally defective stuffed toys are thrown in the incinerator."

"If you don't have constructive input, be quiet," Shizuku quickly grabbed Kanden-yamaneko by her neck, I moved backward slightly.

"Sorry, the rude speaking cat was a gift from Kaede."

"I wonder... are plush toy gifts from Sakura-san all moderator agents?"

"Let's get back on topic." Shizuku easily dodged my question.

"The subject is that we are Kämpfer," the student council president slowly began.

"Kämpfer exist to fight, no matter how each feels. Divided into two groups to form allies and enemies. I don't know why we fight, do you?"

I shook my head. Harakiri-tora never told me even though I'd asked several times.

"I don't know either."

She firmly pressed her finger against Kanden-yamaneko's head. "Even if I ask this little one nicely, she never answers."

"Like Shizuku-sama, I don't know why," the stuffed animal said.

"We're Kämpfer al'ready, what does it matter?" Akane just shook her hand abruptly.

"So, what are you fighting for?"

"What's ta understand? Grab my gun, find enemy, shoot, end of story."

Her aggressive principles were scary. Conflicts in every corner of the world must start with people like her. Her original form is so faint of heart though, completely different.

"So, my reasons are simple, what a'bout you?"

The question was back to me. I thought for a while. Why did I fight even though I hadn't been told the reason? I couldn't think of a

reason not to stop. Shizuku had made me consider my options.

"Just like your little one - I don't know why I fight," I also poked the wildcat, but not as hard.

" *'enormous power is given when fighting as Kämpfer!'* I'm not stupid enough to swallow that line. The moderator must know the reason."

"Yeah... what is the reason?"

"It's important to find out why Kämpfer exist and why we have to fight. As the student council president, I will pursue the answer."

As expected of Shizuku, her passion for the truth of Kämpfer is much stronger than I thought. Fighting without reason doesn't make sense, it's worse than being a Roman gladiator. At least when they were stripped and given a sword they knew it was for entertainment, at least it was a reason they could understand.

"During the last two years have you fought other Kämpfer?"

"Many opponents and they always lost."

That was a frank answer, but something felt weird.

"If I continue to fight I think I will find the reason. If I continue to win I'll catch the eye of the moderator. Once that happens I'll understand everything."

"..."

Shizuku's face as she spoke somehow reminded me of a philosopher. The student council president also had a continual sadness about her. It gave an impression she was much older than her high school aged appearance. It was one reason she was revered by older boys and masochists. Well, not me, I'm devoted to Sakura-san.

Suddenly she smiled, "so, let's decide where to fight."

I was surprised, Akane just snickered, "jus' name a place an' let's go."

"Hold on, wait a minute," I said. "Just now we were talking about not having a reason to fight."

"I just said I would continue to fight."

"Don't you enjoy a challenge? Akane and I just recently became Kämpfer, we're still amateurs. Are we suitable challenges for Shizuku-san?"

"It's me against both you and Akane-san. That's enough challenge for me."

"Ay'm fine with a handicap if she wants to give one. Don't complain Natsuru."

The vicious dog was a happy woman, even if she may be killed. Me, not so much. The president just wanted to impress the moderator. I just wanted to figure out the mystery of the reasoning behind Kämpfer, but that would be hard to do if I'm dead.

"You don't want to fight?"

"Well..."

"What about Kaede? She's safe in my care, for now."

Sakura-san was kidnapped!? The student council president took the woman who I was dating just a few minutes ago? Shizuku was not showing any signs of remorse. "The girl you long for will never return to her house if you don't agree."

"The student council president... is a kidnapper?"

"Strong wording, but yes."

"Aren't Sakura-san and Shizuku-san friends?"

"So, a stuffed animal is also her important friend, and my head still hurts where she poked me."

Huh, that didn't look painful at all.

"I did it because I didn't think you'd fight me otherwise. I'll release her after we fight. Don't worry about it, as long as you don't back out." Shizuku was prepared.

I had to play along, "...the time and place?"

"Two nights from now. You name the place."

"Well... there's a park near here, that will be fine."

"Were you planning on taking Kaede there on your next date?"

"Since it's a large park it will be fine at night even if we're loud."

"It's good for an honor student to be considerate of society." She stood up. Even her casual gestures were graceful.

"Two nights from now, I'm looking forward to it. The bill for your meal has been paid." She left calmly.

As she turned Akane spit out, "see ya, miss high and mighty!"

The date, or to be accurate, the disaster of a date was finished. I went home with Akane, and two Entrails Animals of course. The stuffed toys nagged me worse than Shizuku had.

"What an outrageous woman."

"Ya just gotta apologize. Get on ya knees an beg."

Why apologize?

Shizuku wants to fight; an apology's meaningless. She would just call me a coward and fight anyway. With our limited combat experience was there any chance we'd survive.

"Not likely," I unintentionally replied out loud. Frankly, we didn't stand a chance.

"Whatever, Ay just don't want 'er to win." Akane's voice was muffled.

On our way back we bought a box of Glico Pocky. She mouthed it with an attitude of a cigarette. It didn't seem to be calming her down any.

"Yeah, and we can't save Sakura-san unless we win."

"Ay bet we can win, relax."

"We need a plan if we're going to win."

"Heh. Just keep 'er hands busy."

Not sure how that would help. Shizuku gave us until the day after tomorrow as a grace period. We had to use the time for better plans.

"Akane..."

"Yeah?"

"The student council president's weapons, how do they work?"

"Two dirks an' a chain between 'em so she can pull 'em back fast."

"Is there a weakness?"

"One pull an' those blades return to 'er even when they're out of view."

"But if they're not in her hand she can't wield them against close combat, right?"

"The speed that those blades were returning to 'er at the library was unbelievable. Shizuku's quick."

"fsck...," I was growling, rolling on the floor knowing I was doomed to be skewered by Shizuku in the fight. Mom and Dad, sorry, but your son's life will be unexpectedly short.

"Hey, think about it. Who sez we gotta attack from the front?" Akane said. "If ya attack from the front, keep her busy, Ay can attack from behind."

That may actually work, "she does have two dirks. Keeping both busy may not be easy."

Without eyes on the back of her head it would work.

"Just attack, don't think. Ya won't have time ta think."

Acting without thinking, that's how pyramid schemes work. I continued to flail my arms and legs. I was still a girl, not that it mattered at this point, as I rolled around my skirt was clinging to my thighs. Creepy, annoying thing, I bet a man invented it.

"I had a thought," Harakiri-tora started to say.

"Great, so a stuffed toy has an idea."

"Natsuru-san only fights to save Kaede-san."

"Yeah..."

"I wonder where Kaede-san is being kept."

"I have no idea. Check with Tonma[5], I'm sure the president is a master at it."

"Then, we'll have to help the idiot search."

"If we search we'll confront Shizuku."

"The president won't be there continuously, that would be pointless, only Kaede-san. Take it from me, I was a hostage ten thousand years ago."

Seppuku-kuro-usagi roars with laughter, "what a sucker; never learns, never learns."

"I don't want to be constantly fighting! Damn discontinued toys!"

"I never said to fight all the time. Being smart doesn't mean being a coward."

That made sense and I was being stupid, I decided to keep silent. That idea was a lot better than trying to distract Shizuku from the front. It was more likely to help Sakura-san. Any reason to avoid a sword fight was good for me. We would be acting tomorrow instead of the day after tomorrow. Hopefully Shizuku won't keep a close watch.

"Alright then, where do we start looking for Sakura-san?"

Harakiri-tora posed, "well, to find a human, use human ingenuity."

"How to solve a puzzle of the original secret keeper? The president is very secretive, right? I bet even at home she doesn't tell her parents anything."

Shizuku was so private that a mystery to solve and hobby of the boys' section at the school was to determine her height and weight and her three-sizes. Even when boys approached her to ask they were cut in half with a response of *'show respect for yourself before showing interest in others.'* No information was ever sussed from her. There was a school newsletter column dedicated to visual measurements and guesses of her numbers.

"It's a good plan, right?" Seppuku-kuro-usagi was agreeing with Harakiri-tora, it was stuffed toy cooperation.

"Manage somehow. Watch Shizuku and see what she does."

"Maybe even find a weakness in the president."

"Stuffed toys are nothing if not persistent, more than you humans."

"Let's see if you'll burn," while exploring my pocket I found the lighter I put there earlier.

"...wait a minute," Akane said unexpectedly.

"Harakiri-tora's idea may just work."

"What have you been drinking?"

Although all she'd been consuming was Pocky.

"I just had a good idea," Akane's expression was like a mafioso who just thought of a great way to increase his profits.

Notes

1. ↑ Toei Animation Logo - http://www.toei-anim.com/images/toei_logo.jpg
2. ↑ Restrooms in Japan typically use red signs for women and blue for men
3. ↑ Nana Mizuki - popular Japanese singer-songwriter and voice actress: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nana_Mizuki
4. ↑ Yukari Tamura - popular Japanese singer-songwriter and voice actress: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yukari_Tamura
5. ↑ Legend of Hero Tonma - a game about a fireball throwing hero searching for a kidnaped princess (that situation sounds familiar somehow...): http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legend_of_Hero_Tonma

Chapter 5

Espionage [1]

Even though I wasn't expecting it, this day was as fine and sunny a day as the previous one. I got up unusually early and high-tailed it to school. Of course I was back to being a man. I was the first to arrive at the classroom and I waited for the person of interest. Higashida came in humming and singing out of tune.

"Hey, I have a request" I said as I grabbed his uniform.

"Whoa, that's abrupt." Higashida was surprised, but I didn't care.

"So, how can someone get into the girl's section?"

"That's an odd question out of the blue."

"Are the snow gates still used for illegal activities..."

"You mean the Co-ed Underground Dating Committee?"

Although it has a name, that *'underground'* club is only known by insiders of illegal activities at school. Iron Star Academy has strict *'no-contact'* policies between male and female students. Meeting outside of school is possible, but not easy to accomplish on school grounds. There are still students who want to evade Iron Star Academy's eyes and engage in sensual pleasures with the opposite sex. These students succeed thanks to efforts of the *'Co-ed Underground Dating Committee.'*

That club had been organized immediately after the academy had become co-educational. The first student council president is thought to be the founder of the club. A method of communications between the boy's and girl's sections was devised and has been secret ever since. Funds derived from cultural festival proceeds were passed as bribes to school officials.

Higashida had connections to the *'Co-ed Underground Dating Committee'* through his being chairman of Iron Star's *'Beauty Research Club'* , another illegal club.

"So, Senou, what business do you have there?"

"I want info on the Student Council President."

"Eh!?" Higashida was amazed. "Oi, Sangou-san is hard to contact. She's very popular."

According to him, there were many boy students aiming for Shizuku. There was an unofficial waiting list to worship her; don't laugh, it's not that unusual. I have a similar target.

"Forget contacting her! I want info on her, what she's been up to lately."

"That's private info. Even with manpower and money it would be hard to get."

"That's why I want to sneak into the girl's section."

"Idiot, if anyone found out, you'd be suspended from school."

"That's why I want to connect with the Co-ed Underground Dating Committee."

"How soon?"

"Now."

Higashida groaned "...that's impossible."

"Yeah, probably."

"Even if you contact the Co-ed Underground Dating Committee and get in the girl's section, how will you get details on Sangou-san?"

"...espionage."

"To try and do it today is useless, impossible for anyone."

"If anyone can, it would be Higashida, and his talents."

"My talents!? Communication with the committee has to start from the girls side, and that would have to wait 'till schools out. *'Impossible'* really is impossible."

This was an uphill battle. Illegal activities were not only frowned on by the school officials, but by the student council as well. Every club organization was under total surveillance, any offense would deal heavy damage to the club. Even so, I was desperate.

"If you help me I'll introduce you to a beautiful girl. You can

interview her and take pictures, she's worthy to be added to your Beauty Research Club."

As expected, he took the bait, his eyes lit up instantly.

"It's true? But how would you know her?"

"Hey, think about Sakura-san. How many times have I met with her lately?"

Higashida was pondering, "first, tell the beautiful girl that I..."

"Follow me. She's in the library right now waiting. Come on."

"Good plan..." Higashida and I hurried to the library. There was still time before class, it was the reason I went to school so early. The library was vacant and silent, students rarely went there that early.

"Where are the librarians?" Higashida was puzzled.

"They're busy."

"Nobody's here?"

"Because we knew you were coming" with my fingers I pointed out to Higashida. "In the shadows over there. Got your camera?"

"Right here," he showed me a thin digital camera.

"Photographs are free. If you can get a shot, take it."

"Huh?"

Suddenly a gun was thrust into Higashida's camera.

"Yo, ay'm askin' ya a little favor, nothin' hard for ya. Listen good Higashida." Akane said with a grin. A pocky in her mouth.

Through the Rabbit Hole

Higashida suddenly became cooperative. Having an unknown woman shoving a gun in your face can be very convincing.

First was the information on Shizuku. I told Higashida to just *'tell me what you know.'* According to him the student council used a room in a secluded area of the school, Shizuku prevented outsiders from getting close to the place. Although it was only a rumor, it would be a great place to keep someone in confinement.

This was just the dirt that Akane and I were looking for. There was a good possibility that Sakura-san was being kept there. It was close enough to keep an eye on her, but hard for us to reach. When I asked Higashida why he didn't mention the room earlier he said he was "holding out for an offer of cash." Asshole.

The problem was how to break into the women's section. Higashida was helpful in that area as well, "I've got a tunnel."

Akane had to pretend to pull the trigger of her gun a few times to finally get him to talk (it wouldn't have been pretend if I didn't stop her though).

"Where?"

"Behind the gym. The other end comes out beneath the women's chemistry lab window."

"Since when?"

"It was just finished two months ago, the soil was very hard."

According to Higashida most of the soil was removed during vacation and discarded down the toilets.

"Just like the movie *'The Great Escape.'* "

"Yeah, just like that. Our only light was from candles. We had a cave-in and the guy in there at the time still has neurosis."

I also had a terrible desire to sneak into the women's section, until I

was stuck there.

In an amazingly harsh voice Akane said, "enough funny talk! Tell me how to use it."

"Don't shoot, don't shoot - the watering faucet behind the gym, pull it completely out to open the tunnel."

"Show me."

"First, get in touch with the contact on the women's side to remove the lid on that end."

"Yer gonna do that too." A gun is a great persuasion tool, Higashida's reactions were faster than an exposed cockroach.

The first step was to contact the girl's side. Iron Star Academy jammed cellular signals to prevent communication between the boy's and girl's school sections. The jammer even prevented calls during emergency situations, but that was just *'the price that must be paid.'*

Would you believe Higashida attached a message to an arrow and shot it over the wall? What is this the Sengoku period[2]?

"Please use caution..."

We plan to, as much as possible. I signaled Akane and we left the library. Transformed like she was, she was a bit uncouth and stood out in the library.

"Hey Natsuru, I helped you, how about paying me back..."

"I'm not giving you money."

"No, not that..." Higashida glanced to the side. "I just... let me take a picture of this violent girl."

"You want her picture?"

"She's... beautiful." His breath was ragged as he spoke.

Akane was sounding irritated, saying things like "I'll kill you, but not before I shoot off your hands and feet." Somehow while she was saying that, she was posing like a photo model; Higashida was very happy.

I left the dreamy guy taking pictures of Akane and headed to the back of the gymnasium and waited until Akane was done. As Higashida had said, pulling the faucet opened the concrete slab and exposed a gaping vertical hole. All we had to do was follow the water pipe through the tunnel to the girl's side.

After a short time a short message came back, *'ready.'*

"You can go when you're ready. She'll guide you on the other side."

"Ya did good - fer now."

The tunnel was so small I had to crawl through. Every surface was damp with moisture. The route was well worn, boy's desires can be horrible. By the time I climbed the vertical hole exiting the tunnel the representative for the girl's side of the committee was waiting for me. She was waving both arms and smiling.

"Welcome! I am Nishino Masumi, the committee representative for the girl's side."

Figures it would have to be Masumi. I couldn't think of anyone worse.

"Thank you. A blushing newbie, straight from the boy's side."

That was just the irritation I was feeling.

"Such a shy, modest guy, what are you doing sneaking into the girl's section?"

Any way you look at it, she was being overly meddlesome. Just then Akane came running up from behind her, obviously surprised to see Masumi.

"Ah, so this must be your girlfriend."

Ha, if she wasn't in vicious dog mode, you'd know her very well.

Akane glanced at Masumi then whispered to me, ("what's da story of 'er being here?")

("She's the girl's side representative.")

("Ya gotta be kiddin' me.")

("It was worse when I was the one transformed.")

The previous time Akane had been *'normal'* . This was the reverse pattern. Masumi was beckoning us.

"To start our tour, this is the secret garden of girls, forbidden to boys. It's rather empty now. Don't expect the tour to include girls changing their clothes."

Why bother mentioning that?

"The tour begins here. Follow me." Masumi urged us.

The girl's side was larger than the boy's. It was very well kept. Compared to this the boy's side seemed cluttered. On this side there were flowers, grass and even a fountain, it was a world away. The differences were well known and several attempts to *'rejuvenate the boy's side'* were all crushed before they could gain momentum.

I could hear that the boy's gym class had begun. Come to think of it, that's where I would be. My absence would be noted. The teacher, Nakazawa, was always annoying me. I was absent as often as possible, just like a lot of my classmates.

"Could you hurry a bit more?" I asked Masumi. I wanted to find Sakura-san while the president was likely to be in class. It would be bad to be found during break time.

"Certainly! You really do sound alike."

"What?"

"There's a second-year girl who has a similar voice, I'm sure you must have seen her."

Yeah, I have, in the mirror.

Behind the main girl's school buildings stood the Audiovisual and Music building, home of the specialty schools. According to the information Higashida provided, the Student Council had a makeshift office in a corner of the third floor there. Since it was the middle of the day we had to feel our way into that unknown area carefully.

As we slipped into the building I asked "is there a room here that is

used by the Student Council?"

Masumi gave a baffled look "what business would you have there?"

Even if I told her, she'd never believe that Sakura-san was kidnapped, that the president was the culprit, and I was a fighting Kämpfer.

Masumi's eyes were full of curiosity "please, please tell me!"

As I was puzzling about it Akane said "Ay'll tell ya..."

"Cool!"

"Over 'dere" Akane pointed behind Masumi.

"Eh!?" Masumi turned to look.

GON! Akane smacked the back of Masumi's head with the handle grip of her pistol. As Masumi crumbled she made a *'kyuu'* sound.

"Hey, why'd you do that?"

"Ay used legitimate self-defense."

It was a funny usage of the term. No matter, the nuisance was gone. We made our way up to the third floor, trying to keep our footsteps quiet, we were being cautious. The room used by the Student Council was at the far end of the hallway. The floor was empty since it wasn't club hours.

My body glowed white as Akane forced me to transform to a Kämpfer. I was in a hurry, but Akane held me back.

"Easy! don't expose yer'self to the windows."

The corridor here had windows facing the main school buildings. It was likely a main reason this room was used by the Student Council. It gave Shizuku an advantage.

"Follow me" Akane bent over, leaned against the wall below the windows and carefully made her way to the other end of the hall. She was graceful and stealthy like a cat. I would have expected that her fierce dog persona would just rush across.

"Come on stinky!"

I hurried to follow what she had done.

When I reached the door I stretched out to touch the doorknob. I turned it slowly, "ah, it's not locked!"

"Open it quick."

Without another word I flung the door open and jumped inside like Tom Cruise in *'Mission Impossible.'*

"Sakura-san... huh?" the room was empty, no chair, no desk. Only a mop and bucket. Of course there wasn't any sign of Sakura-san.

Akane and I both stood with our mouths wide open.

"Nobody's 'ere" Akane spat out.

"That bastard Higashida, what kind of bull did he give us?"

"---'dat jerk--- Bet he just said anything ta get those pictures!"

"He just follows what he sees."

"Jerk just fell in love with 'da idea of gettin' pictures of me. Must be true."

"You looked like you were playfully posing for him though."

That guy has no thought for a perfect girl, just the ones he hasn't photographed yet. Anyway, it was a fact, Sakura-san wasn't there. I wondered where she was taken.

Suddenly there was a sound from behind us "excuse me..."

A female student was in the doorway looking at us. "You should be in class, what are you doing?"

"Yer just in time ta help us." Akane walked with determination towards the girl. "Hey, 'da Student Council has a spare room 'round here. We're lookin' for a girl that should be there. How do we get there?"

"Huh...?"

"Tell me!" When Akane was transformed she was beautiful, but her demeanor and aura was formidable. People seeing her for the first time were always overwhelmed.

I tore into Akane, "stop it, you're scaring her!"

"Then she better spill it quickly!"

"Oh... that... the Student Council is helping her..." huh?

Akane and I just stared, mouths open, in front of the scared schoolgirl.

"They don't use this room... they took over the fourth floor..."

We didn't wait to hear any more, but took off running. There was no longer any reason to hide, school was between classes. We ran up the stairs. The layout was the same as the third floor. We ran to the room at the end of the hall.

"Oh, this door is locked."

"Get out a 'da way!" A pistol appeared in Akane's hand.

She didn't hold back and shot both the keyhole and hinges. The door opened on its own. The interior of the room was dim because the curtains had been drawn. This room was clean and empty except a desk and chair.

Sakura-san was seated in the middle of the room with her head hung down. Most likely unconscious.

"Sakura-san!" I ran over to her. Her hands had been tied with ropes. I'm here Sakura-san, your knight to the rescue. Please return my love, towards the man version of me.

But just at that moment a dirk on a chain violently flew towards me.

"My goodness. What bad behavior for a Kämpfer!" As I turned Shizuku was standing there.

Aftermath

Unexpected Returns

Afterword

Notes

1. ↑ The Table of Contents labels are my own, they do not exist in the original volume.
2. ↑ Sengoku jidai - the Warring States Period in Japanese history was a time of social upheaval, political intrigue, and nearly constant military conflict.

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